MELNIKOV
BRATVA
BOOK FIVE
PAVED IN
Fire
A DARK MAFIA ROMANCE
SONJA GREY

Paved in Fire

A Dark Mafia Romance

Melnikov Bratva

Book 5

Sonja Grey

OceanofPDF.com

Contents

Newsletter Sign Up
Also by Sonja Grey
Author's Note
Blurb
Trigger Warning

Prologue
1. Alina
2. Matvey
3. Alina
4. Matvey
5. Alina
6. Matvey
7. Alina
8. Matvey
9. Alina
10. Matvey
11. Alina
12. Matvey
13. Alina
14. Matvey
15. Alina
16. Matvey
17. Alina
18. Matvey

Epilogue
Extended Epilogue

Thank You!
Also by Sonja Grey
About the Author

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright © 2024 by Sonja Grey

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Cover Designed by Cormar Covers

Cover Photo by Wander Aguiar

Cover Model: Carlos

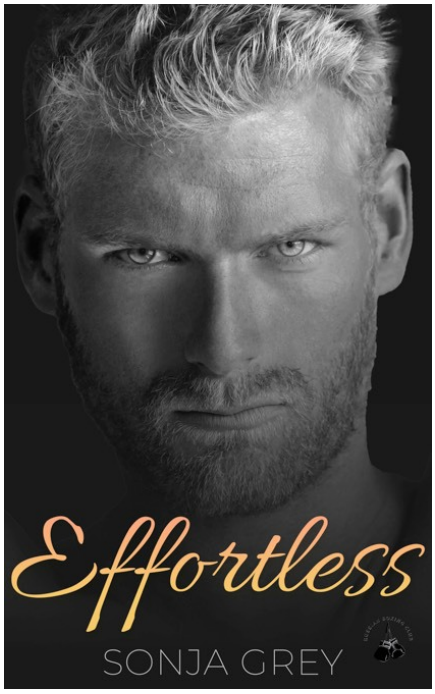
Created with Vellum

OceanofPDF.com

Newsletter Sign Up

If you'd like to be a part of my mailing list and get a free novella and bonus epilogues for every book, then please sign up here! or go to: subscribepage.io/lKtqfy

Sign up to get this story FREE!



OceanofPDF.com

Also by Sonja Grey

All series are interconnected, unless noted, and can be read as stand-alones, but they're more enjoyable if you read them in order.

All are in KU!

Russian Boxing Club

My Russian Obsession

My Russian Temptation

My Russian Salvation

Stand-Alones

Grumpy Bratva Hitman

Delicious Prey

Fedorov Bratva

Caught by the Bratva Boss

Savage Savior

Arrogant Bratva Bastard

OceanofPDF.com

Medvedev Bratva

Devil from Moscow

Bratva Devil

Filthy Devil

Melnikov Bratva

(Should be read in order)

Paved in Blood

Paved in Venom

Paved in Rage

Paved in Hate

Paved in Fire

OceanofPDF.com

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

I'm so happy to finally be able to give you the conclusion to this series!

Matvey is the character who first popped into my head when I started toying around with this idea of a long, continuous, 5-book storyline. In my mind, this series will always be Matvey and Alina's giant love story. I just needed to tell everyone else's story before I could complete theirs.

I've fallen in love with all these characters, but Matvey and Alina have a special place in my heart, and it's never felt so bittersweet to end a book before.

I will be doing a second generation series with this family for one simple reason—I'm not ready to let them go. My hope is that you feel the same way and that you'll want to continue on with the Melnikov family as a new generation rises and takes the power that their dads worked so damn hard for.

Thanks so much for coming along on this journey with me. It means the world to me.

Much love,
Sonja

OceanofPDF.com

Blurb

It’s time to bring Alina home.

Alina:
When I was young, I fell in love with a dark-eyed boy.
I never grew out of that crush.
Not even when the teenaged boy grew up to be a very dangerous man.
Every year it just grew stronger until I finally turned eighteen and forced him to see me as the woman I’d become and not just as his best friend’s little sister.
We were so happy together, but then I was taken. Ripped from him in the cruelest of ways.
But he’s looking for me.
I know he is, and I know he’ll burn the world down to get to me.
I just need to hold on a little bit longer.

Matvey:
I searched for her for two years.
Each day felt like a lifetime.

I was losing my mind, imagining all the things that were being done to her.
But I finally found her.
And now it’s time to bring her home.
They took her from me, and they’re going to pay.
I’m getting Alina back,
and then we’re going to set the world on fire and watch them burn.

OceanofPDF.com

Trigger Warning

This book contains all the elements you would expect from a dark mafia romance.

This is not a fade-to-black book…like at all. Expect dark, on-page content. This book is not recommended for sensitive readers.

If you've read the first four books, then you know what's coming… a lot of violence and some horrible experiences and memories for Alina. Please do not read this book if you're sensitive to such things.

This story does contain graphic violence, abusive relationships, and on-page sexual assault. None of this is between the MMC and FMC!! There is also consensual, explicit sex scenes, and mature language.

Sex trafficking plays a big part in this entire series.

The men I write are fiercely loyal and protective. They will kill anyone (seriously, anyone!) who dares to hurt the women they love, but they're big softies for their women. They tend to fall hard and fast, and there will never be any cheating in my books!

OceanofPDF.com

Prologue

Matvey
Alina's 18th Birthday

My fingers dig into Alina's hip as I guide her out of the crowded club and far away from Grisha's leering stare. I knew coming here was a bad idea, and I knew there was no way in hell she wouldn't attract attention in that fucking tiny, black dress she insisted on wearing. I'm wondering why in the hell I agreed to this, but then she looks up at me with her vivid, blue-green eyes, and the reason is painfully obvious.

I'd do anything for her. It's as simple as that.

Alina may be the one who's been in love with me her whole life, but there's no denying that I've more than caught up with her. What was once a sweet, platonic love for one of my best friend's younger sisters has morphed into something very, very different. I tried to fight it at first, afraid that Roman would be pissed or that it was somehow wrong to love the woman I'd watched grow up, but I'm quickly losing my will to fight this. My eyes

run over the beautiful face that I've memorized every detail of as my hand keeps a firm grip on her hip.

"Who were those guys?"

"No one you need to worry about," I tell her, lifting my hand for the cab that's just pulling up.

"Well, the way you practically carried me out of there makes me think they might be somebody."

I fight a grin at her tone and open the door of the cab. "Get in, Alina. We're going home."

She smiles and hops in, nearly making me groan when she bends over and I see the curve of her ass. Once we're both sitting in the back, I give the driver the address, noticing the nervous look he gives me when he hears my gravelly voice and the look on my face. Alina's the only one who gets real smiles from me. Ever since the fire, I haven't been myself, but the woman sitting next to me has always been able to pull them from me so damn easily. She's impossible to resist. To prove my point, she looks over at me, her face lighting up in a grin that I can't help but return, especially when she takes full advantage of the cramped backseat and scoots closer to me so our bodies are touching.

I'm used to Alina trying to get close to me. Hell, she's been doing it since she was sixteen. Back then it was easier to discourage her. She was too fucking young, and I wasn't about to cross that line. When she was seventeen, I'll admit, it got a little harder. But now that she's eighteen? I don't stand a chance in hell.

She stays glued to my side until the cab drops us off outside the apartment building we all live in and we're forced to separate. Alina's been staying over more and more, and knowing she's sleeping right across the hall from me has made things interesting to say the least.

I pay the cab driver, and when I see a couple of guys eyeing Alina, I pull her against me again and give them a look that has them scurrying back down the damn sidewalk. She gives a soft laugh as I guide her inside.

"Remind me to kill Vitaly for buying you that damn dress," I mutter, pushing the elevator button for the penthouse.

She looks down at her dress, eyeing the tiny thing before turning her face up to me. "You don't like it?"

"No, I don't. It attracts way too damn much attention."

We step off the elevator, and when I open the door to our penthouse, she walks past me with a small huff. Turning on her heels, she faces me—hands on her hips and that mischievous smile that always means trouble. I shut the door and cross my arms over my chest, waiting to see what she'll do. She doesn't make me wait long.

"Maybe I'll just start dressing like this every day."

I take a step closer. "Like hell you will."

She gives an innocent shrug, but that smirk is still playing at her lips, contradicting her at every turn.

"I mean, it was a gift from Vitaly, and it'd be rude not to wear it."

I know how rough my voice can sound, but when I growl out, "You're not wearing that dress out of this damn penthouse ever again," she doesn't even flinch. She's never been bothered by my scratchy voice or my scars. She's always seen right past all of it and straight to me.

"You're trying to get a rise out of me, Alina, but it's not going to work."

She raises a dark brow. "No?"

"No, now take off the goddamn dress and go put on those thick, flannel pajamas I saw you in last week."

She has the nerve to laugh before she steps closer, closing the distance so there's mere inches between our bodies, and with that same smirk playing at her lips, she says, "If you don't want me to wear this dress, then you're going to have to take it off me yourself."

"Alina."

Her name comes out as a growl and a warning and a desperate plea for her to have mercy on me, and she ignores every damn one of those and rests her hands on my waist and looks up at me with the eyes that I can never seem to get out of my head. She's always on my mind in one way or another, and lately that way has been nonstop sexual thoughts that are threatening to drive me fucking insane.

"Why do you fight me, Matvey?"

"I'm not fighting you."

Her brow furrows right before a hurt look crosses her face. Without thinking, I cup her face in my scarred hands and caress her cheek with my thumb. I can't stand the thought of her in pain, and I hate that I'm the cause of it right now.

"Is it because you don't want me?" Her voice is nothing more than a whisper, but she might as well be screaming it at me.

“What?”

Her eyes meet mine. “I’ve loved you for as long as I can remember. At first it was just a childhood crush, but it never went away. It’s just gotten stronger, and then as I got older it changed into something more, and it kills me every time you try to push me away. Every time I see something flash in your eyes that I think might be desire or love, I get my hopes up, but every damn time you pull away from me. You close yourself off from me, Matvey, and it’s killing me. I want the truth. After all we’ve been through, you owe me that.”

Her fingers dig into my waist as she searches my eyes. “Do you feel anything for me?”

My heart fucking breaks at seeing her like this. She looks like she’s seconds away from crying, and I can’t stand it. Resting my forehead against hers, I let out a shaky breath and whisper, “Yes.”

Her gasp is whisper soft, and when I start to kiss along her brow, she lets out the softest moan.

“What about Roman?” I drag my nose along her soft skin, breathing her in like I’ve dreamed about doing. “I don’t want to come between you two.”

“Roman loves you, Matvey, and he knows that you’d never hurt me. Let me worry about him. The others will help smooth things over.”

“Yeah, because Vitaly’s been such a huge help so far,” I mutter.

She gives a soft laugh. “He did buy me this dress, and it did work.”

I pull back enough so I can see her better. “The dress had nothing to do with it.”

“Really? Well that’s good. That means I can keep wearing it.”

“Like hell you will.” My eyes run over the tiny scrap of clothing, and the thought of her walking around in this in front of other men when I’m not around to make sure she’s safe does not sit well with me. I’m about to run through a list of reasons on why exactly she can’t dress like this when I see the smile she’s fighting. I sigh and shake my head.

“You’re fucking with me, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

I let out a heavy sigh, relieved that she won’t be prancing around half-naked anytime soon. Reaching up, she cups my face in her hands and pulls me closer. With her heels on, she’s still shorter than me, but she’s close enough to put our mouths dangerously close. Alina is the only person who can touch me without it making me want to claw at my skin to rid myself of

the feeling. It's pure torture for me to have anyone else's hands on my body, but with her, it doesn't bother me. For a brief moment, I actually lean into her touch, savoring the feel of her skin against mine.

"I want one more present," she whispers.

I smile and drag my knuckles lightly along her cheek. "Someone's feeling greedy this year. I've already given you my favorite hoodie."

"And I love it so much, but I want one more thing."

"And what's that?"

Her eyes meet mine. "A kiss. I want my first kiss, and I want it to be with you, Matvey, because I don't ever want to kiss anyone else."

My heart races in my chest, and I know I'm on dangerous ground here, but instead of pulling back and putting some distance between us, I lower my head until our lips touch. The truth is it's also my first kiss. Not being able to tolerate touch makes it difficult to get close to someone, but kissing Alina feels so damn natural, like it was always supposed to be the two of us together.

She lets out a soft whimper when I deepen the kiss and thread my fingers in her dark hair, cupping the back of her head as my hand palms her lower back, pulling her closer. With her body flush against mine, I'm quickly losing my ability to think rationally, and when I slide my hand lower, she jumps up and wraps her legs around my waist, making it impossible for me to not grab her ass as she clings to me like she's never planning on letting go. I'm more than okay with that.

Her tongue runs along mine, pulling a deep groan from my chest as I hold her tighter. She's broken through all my defenses, all the damn walls I've worked so hard to put up crumble at her touch.

"Matvey."

The sound of her moaning my name and the way her hips start to rock has me fighting for control. I can't let this go any further. Not here, not yet. She just turned eighteen for fuck's sake, and I'm already practically mauling her in the goddamn hallway.

I pull back and rest my forehead against hers, trying like hell to get control of myself. We're still so close that her breaths hit my lips. I breathe in every one of her exhalations, wanting every piece of her that I can get.

"We don't have to stop," she whispers.

I let out a soft laugh. "Yes, we most definitely do."

“But I don’t want to.” She kisses me again, giving my top lip a soft suck that has my dick threatening to bust straight through my damn pants.

“I don’t want to either, and that’s exactly why we have to.”

“Fine,” she sighs, and I smile at the pouty tone of her voice, “I’ll stop but only if you promise me something.”

“And what’s that?”

“That you won’t go back to hiding from me. We can hide things from the others for now, but you can’t hide yourself from me.” Her fingers trail down the side of my face. “Not anymore.”

“I’ve never hidden from you, Alina. You’re the only person I haven’t hidden from.”

She smiles, and it lights up her whole face. Once again I’m stunned by her beauty, and all I can do is stare. Knowing everyone is going to be at the club for a while to make sure Anatoly and Grisha are taken care of, I carry Alina to the couch and sit down. She raises a brow at me and looks down at the way she’s now straddling my lap. Her dress has ridden up even more, and the sight has me letting out a groan.

“I thought you said we needed to stop.”

“We do.” I say the words, but at the same time I’m pulling her closer until we’re kissing again and nothing else matters.

I lose myself in her—the taste of her, the feel of her body against mine and the softness of her lips, the sound of her whimpers, the sweet scent of her, and the way she’s gently grinding against my cock. It’s all I can think about. She consumes every part of me, leaving no room for anything else. The memories of the fire that killed my mom and sister and would’ve taken my own life if not for Vitaly no longer haunt me, the rage I feel towards my dad for starting the damn fire because he was drunk leaves me, and the painful memories of my burnt body disappear. Nothing else can exist when Alina is kissing me. She chases it all away.

I don’t know how long we stay on the couch kissing, but it doesn’t feel nearly long enough when my phone buzzes, forcing me to break away.

“Fuck, I’m sorry.” I dig my phone out of my pocket and read the text that Vitaly’s just sent.

If you’re naked, get dressed. We’re on our way. P.S., You’re welcome for buying Alina that black dress.

“Fucker,” I mutter with a laugh before showing Alina the text.

“Unfortunately, we’re not naked.”

I smile and cup the back of her head, nuzzling my nose along her neck. I breathe her in and kiss a line along her throat.

“I do love the dress,” I admit. “I just don’t want you wearing it for anyone but me.”

Her fingers run through my hair, and I hear the smile in her voice when she says, “Deal. The black birthday dress is officially just for you.”

“Thank you.” I give her neck one last kiss. “Please go put something else on before they get here.”

Smiling, she gives me another kiss before leaving my lap and heading towards the room she always stays in, the one she chose that’s right across from mine. While she’s changing, the front door opens and my brothers walk in. Alina and Roman are the only two who are actually blood-related, but we’re a family all the same.

Vitaly walks in, scanning the room with a big smile on his face. Lev is right behind him not looking nearly as happy.

“Everything go okay?” I ask.

Vitaly laughs. “Yeah, Anatoly and Grisha are no longer a problem.” He looks over at Lev and laughs again. “Someone’s just grumpy because they didn’t get to kill anybody.”

“Maybe if you hadn’t hogged it all,” Lev mutters, plopping down on the couch next to me so he can start setting up the new gaming system he bought for Alina.

Vitaly grabs a bag of chips and sits down on the other side of me. “I offered to let you kick him. It’s not my fault you didn’t take me up on it. Plus, I’m going to let you beat me in the racing game, remember? Fun times are headed your way, Lev.”

Lev laughs and shakes his head, clearly unable to stay pissed at Vitaly. Hell, no one can stay mad at him for long.

He leans in closer to me. “So, did you give Alina a special present while we were gone? Did you make her birthday a memorable one?”

I’m just about to tell him to fuck off when Roman says, “Much more appropriate, Alina. Now I can relax and not worry about my baby sister.”

I look over to see Alina standing near the hallway and realize how wrong Roman is. He may not need to worry about her being in danger, but there’s a lot of things I want to do to his sister that I’m guessing he’d probably never forgive me for. Her face is freshly scrubbed, and she’s wearing her plaid, flannel pajama bottoms and the red hoodie I gave her

earlier. She's just as beautiful as she was with makeup and wearing that tiny dress, and all I can think about is getting her back in my lap.

"Yeah, Roman's never going to pick up on this," Vitaly whispers, eyeing the way Alina and I are looking at one another. "Super subtle."

Danil breaks the silence by setting a bottle of vodka on the coffee table in front of us and several glasses. "Now we can really celebrate your birthday, Alina."

"Yeah, I'm not going to feel bad about kicking your ass on your birthday," Vitaly says. "You're an adult now, so that means no more going easy on you."

Alina laughs and walks over. Grabbing the remote Lev offers her, she sits on the floor in front of me and leans her back against my leg. It's not quite as close as she'd usually come, but it's also not so unusual that it'll draw Roman's attention. I need to talk to him soon about his sister, but I don't want to get into it tonight. Right now, I want to watch my girl kick everyone's ass, and that's exactly what she does.

By the time we all fall asleep, we're more than a little drunk, all of us sprawled out around the living room. Pizza boxes litter the coffee table with a few bottles of vodka and the nearly devoured cake. Alina crawls onto the loveseat where I'm laying on my side and snuggles up against me, pulling the blanket over the two of us. Draping my arm over her, I pull her closer and bury my nose in her hair.

"Happy birthday, Alina," I whisper, kissing her neck as my eyes close.

"Night, Matvey," she whispers back, and falling asleep with her in my arms feels like the most natural thing in the world.

* * *

Three Months Later

Putting my gun away, I quickly pull off my hoodie and jeans and start the shower. Dried blood still covers my hands, and it's splattered all over my face and clothes. Fucking hell, that better wash out. I toe the blue hoodie, wishing I'd chosen something different to wear tonight. In all fairness, I hadn't known I was going to be killing anyone; otherwise, I would've worn my *I don't mind if these get splattered in blood* clothes.

It couldn’t be helped, though. After Anatoly and Grisha had turned up dead, the Safronov Bratva’s been on high alert. I got the order to take out a couple of suspicious-looking men who’d been hanging out in one of our clubs, and it wasn’t an order I could say no to, at least not yet. Once we take over, I won’t be taking orders ever again, but even though we’re close, we haven’t taken over yet.

The hot water runs over me, washing me clean and leaving only the scarred, tattooed skin behind. Sometimes it’s hard to even remember a time when my back and arms and hands weren’t covered in rough scars. Hell, I can’t even remember what my voice sounded like before the smoke inhalation left me with the raspy one I have now.

It’s for the best, I tell myself, turning off the water and running the towel through my hair before dragging it over my body and wrapping it around my waist. It’s best not to remember what life was like before the fire, and it’s definitely best not to remember the little sister who laughed at my jokes and loved to watch cartoons while she ate her breakfast. I can’t remember her voice either, but I do vividly remember the sounds of her screams as she burnt to death.

Forcing myself to take a deep breath, I leave my bathroom and step into my bedroom, not at all surprised to find Alina lying on my bed, reading her book. She tries to pretend she’s still reading, but her eyes keep darting over to my bare upper body. If she was anyone else, I’d be pissed off and reaching for a shirt to cover my scars, but this is Alina, and the only irritating thing about this is that I can’t drop my towel and bury myself inside her, at least not yet. She’d be more than okay with it, but I want to take things slow. She’s still so damn young, and I don’t want to rush her.

When her eyes run over my chest again, I lift a brow and ask, “Good book?”

“Mm-hmm.”

She manages to keep her eyes on the book for almost a full minute before they dart right back to my chest. She finally meets my eyes when she hears me laugh.

Giving up the pretense, she sets the book aside. “It’s not funny.”

I smile at her. “It kind of is.”

She smiles back and pats the bed. “Come lay down.”

I grab my boxer briefs, ignoring the disappointed look she gives me and slip them on under my towel before grabbing a long-sleeve tee.

“Well, that’s no fun,” she mutters, making me laugh as I turn off the overhead light and crawl into bed next to her. Every night that she stays at the penthouse, she sneaks into my bedroom. It’s gotten to the point where I’m not so sure I can fall asleep if her small body isn’t tucked up against mine.

As soon as I’m lying down, she finds me in the dark. Her hands clasp behind my neck, pulling me closer. Smiling, I roll over. With my hand on her hip, I scoot her under me so my body cocoons hers, just like she likes it. I’ve memorized everything about her, the things that make her gasp and whimper, the soft caresses that make her shiver and kiss me harder, and the touches that make her wrap her legs around me and rock her hips like she’ll never be able to get enough.

Her hands slide under my shirt, and my first instinct is to tense up when I feel her fingers run along my scarred back, but she whispers my name and kisses me so damn gently, making me immediately relax into her touch.

“Your scars don’t bother me,” she whispers in between kisses. “They never have. They’re a part of you, and I love every damn part of you, Matvey.” Her fingers lightly trail along my spine. “These remind me that you’re alive. I could’ve lost you so easily that night.”

The tremor in her voice has me cupping her face. “But you didn’t. I’m here, Alina, and I’m not going anywhere. We’re going to have a lifetime together.”

The heat of her breath hits my lips, and when she starts to pull my shirt off, I let her. I don’t even stop her when she quickly yanks her own off, tossing it aside and making me let out a groan at the feel of her bare chest against mine. It’s the sweetest kind of torture, and I honestly don’t know how much longer I can hold out. She’s getting harder and harder to resist.

“Matvey.”

That one word holds so much in it. It’s a plea for more, a declaration of love, and a promise of a future that I can’t wait to live.

“*Malishka.*” I murmur the word against her skin, knowing how much she loves it when I call her baby girl. “You constantly threaten to destroy what little willpower I have.”

“Then stop fighting me.”

I give a soft laugh and then reach down to stop her curious fingers from sliding into my boxers. I’m only human, and there’s no way in hell I’ll be able to resist her if she wraps her hand around me. I distract her by running

my tongue over her nipple. It works. Both her hands reach for my head as she threads her fingers in my hair. What was supposed to be a distraction for her, turns into an inner battle for me that borders on cruel and unusual punishment.

Her body writhes beneath mine as she tightens her legs around my waist and grinds against me with absolutely no regard for my sanity. I know what she's doing, and I'm helpless to stop her. It's not the first time she's brought herself to orgasm by rubbing against me, and I very much doubt it'll be the last. With her soft moans in my ear and my mouth full of her perfect breast, I rock against her, sliding my hard length along where she needs it most. It never fails to make her squirm, and now is no exception.

I lose myself in her, wanting to make her feel good, wanting to show her how damn much I love her and care about her. I don't care if it kills me; I just want to give her as much pleasure as possible.

When she comes, she buries her face against my neck, moaning my name as her body trembles beneath mine, and I grit my teeth to not join her. I work her through the orgasm, flooding her body with pleasure until the aftershocks fade away and she becomes so tender that she starts to squirm to protect her overly sensitive clit.

"How long are you going to make me wait?"

I smile and kiss my way to her lips. "I did just make you come," I point out.

"But I want you, all of you, and I want to give all of myself to you."

Cupping her face, I kiss her gently and say the words that will soon haunt me. "We have all the time in the world, *malishka*."

I roll over and pull her against me. She snuggles closer, letting out a soft sigh before resting her hand on my chest and her head on my shoulder. One of her legs is hiked over mine, and I smile at how perfectly we fit together. I hold her tighter and kiss her head.

"I love you," I whisper, "and I'm going to marry you and we're going to have a family one day." My fingers run through her dark hair. "I'll give you anything you want, Alina."

Her response is immediate. "I only want you."

"You have me."

"Then I have everything."

I smile at how damn sweet she is and kiss her again. "I'm still going to spoil you."

“I’ll still let you,” she says, making me give a soft laugh.

I fall asleep easily, something I only started doing once she started sneaking into my bedroom at night. Since the fire, I’ve been plagued with insomnia. When I do manage to fall asleep, I have night terrors that leave me drenched in sweat and a throat raw from screaming. Sometimes the nightmares are so vivid that I swear I wake up with the smell of my sister’s burnt body clinging to me. It makes it impossible to fall back asleep.

The nightmares never come when Alina is next to me, though. She chases every bad thing away.

The next day I get assigned a hit that ends up taking longer than planned. By the time I get to the coffee shop where Alina’s supposed to meet me, I’m twenty minutes late and desperate to see her. I scan the crowd, ignoring everyone who isn’t her. I send her a quick text, and when she doesn’t immediately respond, my heart rate starts to pick up and a cold sweat breaks out along the back of my neck. This isn’t like Alina. She doesn’t play games. She would never just not show up or ignore my texts.

When I try to call her and it goes straight to voice mail, I start shouting her name, ignoring the looks people are starting to give me. My lungs constrict, and I can barely get a breath in when I call Roman.

“I can’t find her,” I say, hardly recognizing the sound of my own voice.

“What? Matvey, what are you talking about?”

“Alina. She was supposed to be here, and she’s not here.”

Whatever he hears in my voice has him saying, “Give me the address,” as he yells what’s happening to our brothers.

I tell him where I’m at and hang up. I keep yelling Alina’s name and searching the area, but I know in my heart that she’s gone. I can feel the loss of her, a deep ache that threatens to consume me until there’s not a goddamn thing left.

I was late. She needed me, and I wasn’t here. I couldn’t protect her, and now something’s happened. When my brothers arrive, we spread out and look for her, searching every place we can think of. It quickly becomes obvious that she wasn’t in some sort of accident. She wasn’t on her way to see me when she got hit by a car or got held up by a talkative friend or neighbor. Alina was taken. Some bastard came in and took the woman I love away from me, and every second she’s gone is like a knife to my fucking chest.

Twenty goddamn minutes is all it took to change my life. Twenty minutes that's led to a two-year search and a heart that continues to beat, even though the loss of her has shattered it.

My brothers and I have devoted our lives to finding her, and we finally know the name of the bastard who's keeping her. Konstantin Lebedev—the man I've shaken hands with, talked with, and ate supper in his fucking mansion with.

I've thought about a lot of things over the last two years. I've imagined the things that are being done to her, I've tormented myself with images that I'll never be able to rid myself of, and I've hated myself for being late on the one day she needed me most. I'll carry that regret around for the rest of my life.

Along with my fears and self-hate, I've spent a lot of time thinking about my revenge, because I will have it. Tonight, my brothers and I are getting Alina back. We'll do it together as a family, just like we do everything.

Brothers in blood, in life, and in death.

Tonight, we're taking back what's ours. Someone fucked with our family, and they're going to pay with their lives.

And the man responsible for all this?

He's going to pay with a lot more than just his life. I want blood and pain. I want my goddamn pound of flesh, and I'm damn well going to get it.

He hurt the woman I love.

I'm going to make damn sure he regrets that before he takes his last breath.

It's time to take back what's ours.

It's time to bring Alina home.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 1

Alina

The dirty mattress in the corner taunts me. It's cheap and thin and without sheets, but it's way better than having my bare ass on the hard floor. Even after all this time, the temptation to crawl over and lay down on it is strong. I'm just smart enough now to not act on it. I've never been able to see any hidden cameras in the rooms he keeps me in, but he somehow always knows when I've disobeyed, and his punishments are never worth disobeying him. Even if I crawl over and relieve my ass for no more than five minutes, he'll know, and he'll make me pay.

Instead of giving my ass a momentary break, I wrap my arms around my legs and let my mind drift to what happened yesterday. Seeing Vitaly had awakened something inside me. My mind keeps playing tricks on me, trying to convince me that I dreamed him, but I know I didn't. He was here, and he'd seen me. I don't know how in the hell he found me, but he did, and he'd made it clear that my family was coming to get me.

My thoughts start to wander to Matvey, to the way my heart had nearly shattered when I thought he'd gotten married. The thought of him with another woman makes me feel like I'm going to be sick. I can't think about that now. I can't think about anything except staying alive long enough for them to get me the fuck out of here, for them to get me away from *him*.

As if I've conjured the devil himself, I hear the door start to open. My body instinctively starts to shake. He may not have completely killed my mind yet, but he's ruined my body in every conceivable way.

Konstantin walks into the room. He's dressed in another expensive, black suit, looking deceivingly human, but he's not fooling me. I know what he is. His blue eyes run over me, and I'm careful to not meet them—

one of the many things that's not allowed. I see his lips pull up in a smirk before he snaps his fingers, and just like that my body moves of its own accord. I get on all fours and crawl to him like the dog he's forced me to become. His well-trained bitch, ready to heel at a moment's notice.

I hate myself a little more with each step I take, and when I'm kneeling before him, I keep my head bowed until he roughly grabs my chin, forcing my face up to meet his. On the outside, Konstantin Lebedev looks perfect—a man any woman would be thrilled to catch the attention of, but I no longer see his good looks. I just see a monster.

"Such a good pet," he murmurs, digging his thumb into my jaw to the point of pain. I keep my face neutral and a vacant stare in my eyes. It pleases him, so he lets out a soft laugh and releases the pressure the tiniest bit. I'm not so stupid to think it's because he cares. I learned long ago that he never does anything to be nice. I don't think he's capable of kindness, not even the tiniest bit.

"We're going out tonight." His thumb runs over my jaw. "I'm going to show you off, and you're going to do me proud, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir." I force the words out, even though what I really want to do is spit in his goddamn face.

"But first we need to get you clean." His fingers slide down my neck before he tightens them. "And then we'll get you dirty again."

I bite my tongue, stifling the scream that's desperate to come out. He hasn't touched me since Vitaly was here, and I'd been hoping that maybe, just maybe, he wouldn't touch me again. I should've known better.

Fisting my hair, he drags me to the connecting bathroom and shoves me inside. Letting go, he leans a broad shoulder against the doorframe and says, "Get in the shower and clean yourself. I can't have you embarrassing me tonight."

I scurry to the tub, staying on my knees as I start the water. When my hand hits the hot water faucet, his voice stops me. "No hot water. I'm not so sure you deserve it."

Keeping my face blank, I let my hand fall away and force myself under the freezing cold water. My body immediately starts to shake and by the time my body is clean and I reach for the shampoo, my teeth are chattering. Konstantin watches me the whole time. Privacy is a luxury that I haven't experienced in a very long time. As soon as I've rinsed out the conditioner, I shut off the water and stay in the tub, head bowed, waiting for orders.

I see his expensive leather shoes come into view and then the white, fluffy towel he's holding. He waits several minutes, watching my body shake, waiting to see if I'll disobey and reach for the towel.

I don't.

"So well behaved," he murmurs, dragging the towel along my skin. He dries me slowly, and soon I'm shivering in fear instead of just from the cold. His fingers graze my shoulder, making me feel like my skin is crawling with bugs, like I need to claw my skin to free it from tiny, invisible insects and from the stain of his touch. I know in my heart I will never be clean of him. He's ruined me, and now I'm covered in his filth. No amount of showering will ever rid me of his touch.

When I'm dry, he says the words that I'm dreading. "Hands and knees, pet."

I lower my shaking body to the hard, tiled floor while my mind starts to drift away. At first, I fought him. I fought like hell to keep my body away from him, but it never worked. This was a fight that I was never going to win. I wanted Matvey to be my first. He's the only man I ever wanted to touch me, but my choice was taken from me, and I was left torn and bloody and wishing someone would just kill me and be done with it. No matter how hard I fought, though, he never threatened to kill me. What he threatened was far worse. I decided fighting back wasn't worth being thrown into a shitty brothel where countless men would have their way with me every goddamn day. Surviving one monster is bad enough. I don't think I could handle more than one.

He presses the side of my face into the cold, hard tile while I ignore the pain and the tears and the memory of a touch that was given in love and not a sadistic need to overpower and hurt me. If I think too much about Matvey, I won't be able to endure this. Sometimes a beautiful memory can tear your heart out when you're experiencing the worst kind of pain. It's just too damn much—a bright light that has no place in this dark hell I'm living.

I bite my lip to keep from crying out, wishing he would just finish and be done with me, but he makes it last. He always does. When he finally lets go with a deep groan that almost makes me dry heave, I will myself to take a deep breath, swallowing the bile that's threatening to crawl up my throat.

When he slides out of me, I feel the ache in every part of my body. He roughly squeezes my hips and gives a soft laugh before I hear his zipper being pulled back up.

Squatting next to me, he drags a finger along my spine before giving my ass a hard smack. “Get the fuck up and get ready. Wear the black dress. I’ll be back to get you in an hour.”

And with that he walks out of the bathroom, leaving me a crumpled mess on the floor. I feel his seed start to slide out of me, tracing a path along my inner thigh. I fight to keep what little food I have in my stomach from coming back up. Shortly after he took me, Konstantin brought in a doctor to give me a birth control shot, and I’ve been getting a new one every three months like clockwork. It’s the one small mercy in all of this. The first time he raped me, he told me that a pathetic pet whore would never be worthy to carry his child. I’m more than okay with that. The thought of his baby growing inside me makes me feel like I’m seconds away from losing my mind. I would never survive it. He’s taken every goddamn part of me, but he’s not taking my fucking womb.

Forcing myself up, I make sure he’s really gone and then wet a cloth with warm water. Pressing it between my legs, I hiss out a breath and remind myself that it’s the last fucking time. It *has* to be. We’re leaving for the Red Viper, and Vitaly promised they would be there. They won’t leave me with him. I know they won’t.

I spend the next hour getting ready. Konstantin likes me to dress up for him, so the bathroom drawers are stocked with makeup and lotions that he likes the smell of, and in the closet is a small selection of dresses. I grab the black one, the one that’s practically see-through and the matching thigh-highs. The heels are ridiculously tall and kill my feet, but what’s one more pain to add to the mix.

Looking in the mirror, I barely recognize myself. My ribs are visible through the lacy dress, and the deep shadows under my eyes still standout despite the makeup I applied. I look gaunt and vacant and so fucking miserable. Unable to face the truth of what I’ve become, I turn away and sit back down on the floor, waiting for Konstantin to come back and get me.

My fingers scratch at the black viper ouroboros tattoo that circles my wrist. The viper is riddled with faint silver scars from when I’d scratched the hell out of it after Konstantin held me down and forced it on me. For that disobedience, he’d spread me wide, tying my wrists and ankles to the posts of a bed and left me there until I’d had no choice but to piss myself, and then he’d beat me for ruining his fancy sheets and goose down mattress topper.

I hear the doorknob turn and release my wrist before Konstantin opens the door. He's dressed in another expensive, all-black suit with his dark hair slicked back and his face freshly shaved. He could easily be a model for the suits he loves so much, and I really hate that. I may only see him as the vile monster he is, but to the rest of the world he's disarmingly handsome. His outside should match his inside, but it doesn't. The most dangerous predators rarely ever look the part.

None of it matters, though. He can shove his perfect looks straight up his goddamn ass. I'd give anything for familiar scarred hands and a pair of almond-shaped eyes that are so dark they look black. Matvey is the only man who will ever have my heart. Konstantin can destroy my body and think that he owns it, but he'll never own every part of me. He'll never get inside my heart, and my body will never respond to him except in fear.

He snaps his fingers at me, and I crawl over to him, hating myself a little more with each step.

"My pet cleans up so nicely." He squats down and roughly fists my hair, holding my head still as he holds up the leather collar I wish I could burn. "You can't go out without your collar on, pet. You know the rules."

He grins and slides the thick leather around my neck before buckling it so tight I can barely swallow. When he hooks the matching leash to it, I feel the rebellious spark inside me start to die. Being led around like an animal kills my fight. It's humiliating and dehumanizing, and the thought of Matvey seeing me like this makes me want to die. It's that embarrassment that has me whispering a plea before I can stop it.

"Please."

His eyes widen slightly, just as surprised by my whispered plea as I am.

"I'm sorry," I quickly say, keeping my eyes on the floor.

Wrapping the leash around his hand, he tightens it and jerks me closer. "Please what?"

Too scared to speak, all I can do is let out a shaky exhale, and when he gives a sharp tug, a whimper escapes before my air is cut off.

"Please what?" he demands. "It's been so long since you've spoken out of turn, pet. Tell me what's so important that it was worth pissing me off."

He releases enough pressure so I can take a breath and speak. "I'm sorry, sir" is the first thing I say, not that I'm holding out much hope that it'll help, and then I add, "I just thought maybe we could skip the collar tonight."

“Look at me.”

Those three words send a chill down my spine. He never wants me to look him in the eyes. He only asks when he’s particularly pissed off. I let out another shaky breath and lift my eyes to his. The blue eyes staring back at me are hard and devoid of any humanity.

“Afraid everyone is going to know you’re my whore?”

Too scared to speak, I stay silent.

“I hate to break it to you, sweetheart, but everyone already knows. Maybe I’ll add you to the entertainment tonight.” He thinks about it and gives a soft laugh. “I think fucking you in public will be the perfect punishment. It’ll remind you who you belong to.” Leaning closer so I can feel the heat of his breath on my face, he says, “And, pet, when I take you in front of everyone, it’ll be in your ass. You always cry so damn sweetly when I do that.” The laugh he gives kills one of the small parts of myself that I have left. “I’m sure everyone will appreciate the show.”

And with that, he stands and tugs on the leash so hard that I can either scramble to my feet or have my air completely cut off. I stand on wobbly ankles, trying to get my body under control. Konstantin won’t rape me again, I tell myself. No way in hell will my family allow that to happen. I hold onto that truth, repeating it over and over in my mind as Konstantin pulls me from the room. I keep my head down while we walk past the two men who are always standing watch outside my door and when he pulls me down the stairs, I grip the railing and try like hell to make sure I don’t fall.

When we’re on the first floor, I see the other women, the ones who work for the Lebedev brothers, the ones I sometimes hear screaming at night. I recognize the sounds; it’s the same noises I used to make before he taught me with his fists to be silent. Now I don’t make a sound, not even when I wake up from the night terrors that have become an almost nightly occurrence.

The women briefly meet my eyes, a second-long glance of solidarity that comforts me more than they’ll ever know. I hope I’m able to do the same for them, but it’s impossible to tell. We’ve all become pros at hiding how we really feel. I lift my eyes just enough to scan the rooms as we walk through them. I don’t see their sister. I haven’t seen her for days. When Vitaly had seen me, he’d mentioned something about being married to her, but I don’t know how in the hell they would’ve ever met. Konstantin and Osip keep her on as short of a leash as the one I’m currently attached to.

Their sister's always careful to ignore me when I do see her, but I never once thought she was cruel like her brothers. I don't think they abuse her in the same way they abuse us, but there's something broken inside her all the same.

Once we're in the living room, Konstantin walks in and stops by the couch. Osip is in one of the leather chairs with a drink in hand, and Oksana is resting on the couch. Konstantin's wife looks up at her husband and then at the leash he's carrying, following it with her eyes until she hits the collar and then finally my face. I used to think Oksana was an uncaring bitch, but over the last two years, it's become painfully obvious that she's a drug addict who will do anything to escape the hell that is her marriage to Konstantin. Our eyes briefly meet before guilt makes her look away. I can tell by the dazed look and sluggish movements that she's on something, but Konstantin doesn't seem to care.

"We're going out." His voice is cold when he speaks to her.

She raises her eyes to his. "Me too?"

He lets out a harsh laugh. "Fuck no. You think I have any desire to show off my pathetic wife?"

Instead of being offended, Oksana looks relieved to be avoiding the excursion. She relaxes back against the couch while Konstantin turns to Osip, no longer interested in his wife.

"We're ready to go."

Osip finishes his drink and stands. Running his eyes over me, he gives me a wink that makes my skin crawl. "Ready for the club, Nadia?" he asks, using the fake name I'd given them. I don't answer because I don't feel like getting smacked. I keep my eyes down as he steps closer.

Konstantin hands him the leash. "Take her to the SUV."

I don't see the smile, but I know Osip's grinning when he grabs the leash and gives it a sharp tug. Osip's always hated the fact that Konstantin won't share me with him, and he never misses an opportunity to take that anger out on me.

Biting back a wince when he pulls sharply on the leash, I follow him out of the room and down the hall. Even though it's cold outside and he stops to put on a coat, he doesn't offer me one. Instead I'm dragged outside in nothing but a flimsy scrap of lace. It's started snowing, making it treacherous in heels, and I nearly slip and fall on the sidewalk. Osip gives

an annoyed grunt and pulls harder, cutting off my air and nearly making me fall on my ass again.

Opening the back door, he waits for me to get in. I don't want to bend over in front of him, but I also know I don't have a choice. When I step my foot up, pushing this stupid excuse of a dress up even more, I'm not at all surprised when he slides his hand between my thighs. I knew it was coming, but I still flinch at his touch. He groans and roughly pushes my panties aside, sliding two fingers into me in a hard thrust that makes my eyes water. After Konstantin's assault in the bathroom, I'm so sore that I have to bite my lip to keep from crying out from the pain.

"Our little secret, right, Nadia?" he groans by my ear. "My brother refuses to share you with me, but that's not going to stop me from feeling this tight pussy any goddamn time I want. He thinks he's kept you from me, but I'm going to be walking around all night with the scent of your cunt on my fingers."

A whimper escapes when he plunges his fingers in deeper. Bringing his lips to my ear, he growls, "One night very soon, I'm going to visit you in your room, and if you tell Konstantin about any of this, I swear I'll fucking skin you alive. I can make your death last for days, sweetheart."

I nod my head, my body shaking so badly I can barely keep myself upright.

"Do you understand me, pet?"

"Yes, sir," I whisper, letting out a relieved breath when the front door opens and Osip slides his fingers out of me.

"Such a good little bitch," he murmurs with a laugh, stepping back so I can get in.

He shuts the door and gets in the passenger side while Konstantin gets in the driver's seat. Fifteen of his top men file into two other black SUVs. They take the lead and rear on our drive to the Red Viper. I've never been to the club. I rarely get to leave the house at all. Usually my days are spent in whatever bedroom I've been locked in, in a constant state of worry and fear while I wait for the door to open and my own personal monster to walk in.

The city passes by outside my window, and the closer we get to downtown, the busier the traffic and sidewalks get. I watch a couple leaving a lit-up bar, and my heart aches at the sight of them. His arm is wrapped around her, and she's laughing and looking up at him with a huge smile on her face. I envy them so fucking much, and I want to bang my fist against

the window and scream at the entire fucking universe for the shit hand I've been dealt. That happy couple on the street should be me and Matvey. His arm should be around me as I look up and smile at him, both of us laughing and so goddamn happy. All of that was taken from us, and the hate and rage I feel threatens to overwhelm me. The only thing that keeps me in check is knowing that if I throw a fit right now, Konstantin will just take me back to the mansion, and I can't let that happen. The guys are saving my ass tonight, and I'm going to get my goddamn revenge.

I'm not sure what I'm expecting the Red Viper to be like, but the dingy, shithole they pull up to is not it. The expensive cars parked in the full lot are completely at odds with the rundown-looking dive bar. I search the outside of the building while Konstantin parks, desperate for a glimpse of Matvey or one of the other guys, but I don't see anyone.

Once we're parked, five of Konstantin's men take up position outside while the other ten men trail us, keeping a lookout for any threats. The large man standing outside the club doesn't inspire confidence. He looks nothing like the well-trained men surrounding us, and when he runs his eyes over all of us, I can see the fear start to creep in. Before he can shit his pants, a man in a suit appears with a huge smile on his face.

"David," Konstantin says by way of greeting, not even sparing a glance at the bouncer as he walks past, pulling me along behind him.

"Mr. Lebedev, we're so happy to have you here tonight."

David might as well get on his knees and beg for the privilege of kissing Konstantin's ass for all the groveling he's doing. His eyes run over me and he gives a soft smirk before saying, "Your pet is beautiful, Mr. Lebedev, but if you'd like to sample what we have, you know you're welcome to any of them."

Konstantin ignores him and steps into the dark, loud club. Music throbs from hidden speakers and everywhere I look there are naked or half-naked women in all different stages of servicing the men who crowd around and paw at them. I feel like I've stepped into a new level of hell that I hadn't been aware existed. Every woman in here is wearing the same viper ouroboros tattoo that marks my wrist. Most are red and some are black, but we've all been marked by it.

I walk in between Konstantin and Osip while my eyes keep darting around us, trying to take in everything while desperately searching the crowd. I keep looking for a man in a hoodie with a familiar profile, but the

truth is I have no idea what Matvey looks like now or how he's changed. That thought alone is enough to make me feel like I have a heavy weight on my chest. I used to know him as well as I know myself, but after two years I'm a completely different person, and I don't want him to feel like a stranger.

We walk past a topless woman who's standing near the VIP entrance, and when Konstantin takes a seat at a table in the corner, I do what's expected and kneel at his feet. He's still pissed at me for talking out of turn, so he doesn't rest his hand on my head like he would usually do. Instead, he smiles at the waitress who walks over and cups her bare ass, stroking her cheek with his thumb. If he's trying to make me jealous, he's in for a severe disappointment. I just feel relief and then guilt because if his hands aren't on me, then it means he's molesting some other poor woman.

David sits down next to the seat Osip takes, and when another man walks over and pulls a redhead into his lap, David laughs and says, "Go easy on her, Aaron. She's one of the new girls."

Aaron gives the woman a sleazy smile and pinches one of her nipples hard enough to make her wince. "I'm breaking her in, David. She can either handle it or she can't. It's best we find out early."

Konstantin looks over at him and says, "True enough, but I'd rather a paying customer break the product instead of you."

Aaron's face pales at Konstantin's tone at the same time as his hand falls from the poor woman's breast. He forces a smile and pats the woman's ass, letting her know she should get up and make the rounds.

"Of course," Aaron says, taking the whiskey one of the waitresses brings over. He downs it in one gulp, clearly trying to swallow his anger along with the alcohol.

Konstantin waves the woman he'd just been groping away and rests his hand on my head, petting me in deceivingly gentle strokes. Leaning closer so only I can hear, he points to the center of the room, the area that's currently being used by a pole dancer.

"Later, that's where I'm going to fuck your tight ass, pet. Everyone in the club will be able to see your humiliation. You shouldn't have pissed me off, sweetheart."

Even though I know Vitaly said they'd be here tonight, a shiver of fear still runs through me because there's no guarantee they'll get here in time or be able to stop it.

When he asks, “Do you regret speaking out of turn?,” my whispered answer of “Yes, sir” is an easy one. I’m terrified of the man next to me, and that fear isn’t about to just pack up and leave because I’m close to being free of him. The truth is I’ll never be free of him. He’s made damn sure of that.

“Good,” he whispers back, giving my cheek a soft kiss before he goes back to petting my head. He wants me to sit here and think about what’s to come. He wants every second of tonight to be pure torture for me.

Mission fucking accomplished, you sadistic fuck.

“Where are the Melnikov brothers?”

All my senses go on high alert at Konstantin’s question. Osip digs his phone out and sends a quick text. The reply is quick, because in less than a minute, he turns to Konstantin and says, “They’ll be here in thirty minutes.”

My heart races and my palms start to sweat. I have no idea what to expect. I just know that everything changes tonight. I know that whatever happens, I’m not going back to that fucking mansion with Konstantin. I’ll either be rescued in this club tonight, or I’ll die trying to get away. No way in hell will I be able to look at my family and then allow myself to be parted from them again.

I was taken once. I’ll be damned if it happens again.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 2

Matvey

She's here.

I stare at the text Timofey just sent me, clenching my phone so tightly I'm surprised the screen doesn't crack. He's sent a picture, and when I zoom in and see the look on Alina's face as she kneels next to that fucking bastard, I'm seconds away from storming in there and lighting the whole goddamn place on fire. It's the first time I've seen her in two years, and my chest aches at the sight. I'd recognize her anywhere, but it's impossible for me to not see all the changes. Her blue-green eyes are empty of everything except fear, her full lips are in a tight line instead of the smiles that once came so easily to her, and she's too fucking thin. Her clavicle sticks out sharply, and that stupid fucking dress isn't doing shit to hide how gaunt she's become. When I realize she's wearing a collar and that he's holding the goddamn leash, a growl escapes from my tight throat. I'm going to enjoy killing Konstantin very slowly for everything he's done to her.

"Almost, brother," Lev says, looking over my shoulder at the picture I'm still clutching. "Just a few more minutes."

I nod, knowing he's right. I can't risk her life just because I'm running out of patience and my need to feel his blood on my hands is becoming overwhelming. I've waited this long. I can manage a few more minutes.

Looking over, I see Danil texting someone. "Is that Dominic? What's he say?"

Danil reads the text that comes in. "There are five Lebedev men stationed around the building and ten entered the building with Konstantin and Alina, along with Osip. David met them at the door."

“I’m sure he did,” Vitaly mutters, stuffing another gummy into his mouth. “I bet the little fucker had a raging hard-on when he did it, too.”

“Don’t forget Aaron’s mine,” Lev says.

“He’s yours,” I agree.

“And I’m taking out Emily’s dad,” Roman says from the front seat. He looks back at us and gives a soft laugh. “I can’t believe he agreed to come here tonight. I may have lied and said that Konstantin demanded he and his friends show up.” He laughs again. “Yeah, that might’ve been it.”

I smile as much as I’m able to. I know how much he’s been looking forward to killing Emily’s dad, and I’m happy he’ll finally be able to make it happen. I don’t mention that Konstantin is mine. Everyone already knows he’s to be left alive. I have plans for him and none of them include a quick death.

Looking at my watch, I try and force myself to relax. Ten minutes left. As if on cue, another black SUV pulls in front of us and Dominic steps out, followed by several of his men. Before we get out to join them, I look at my brothers, knowing there aren’t any guarantees tonight. I’d made Vitaly promise he’d leave me behind if it came to that, but I know he’ll never do it.

Five of us will be walking out or none of us will be. It’s as simple as that.

I meet their eyes, and as serious as the moment is, I’m not at all surprised when Vitaly breaks the silence with a laugh and asks, “Are we about to start crying?” He finishes the fruit snack that Lev had tossed him earlier and adds, “Because I’m not so sure my dick can take that. Plus, we can’t go out there and meet the Italians with tears in our eyes. Dominic will never let us live that down. It will destroy our reputation as fierce Russians who shouldn’t be fucked with.”

“True,” Lev agrees. “Dominic’s cocky enough as it is.”

“So true,” Vitaly says, looking out the tinted window at the future head of the Alessi family. “I mean, who the fuck shows up for a gunfight in a bespoke suit and wool jacket?”

Lev laughs. “I’ll just gently remind him about the time I shot him. That might take him down a peg or two.”

Danil looks back at his phone and types another quick message before meeting my eyes. “It’s time.”

I nod, knowing that every detail of tonight has been planned out meticulously by Danil. There won't be any security footage, and because Roman made sure to have the mayor and a few congressmen here, the police won't be a problem either.

"Let's get Alina and bring her home," Roman says. He squeezes my shoulder when we start to get out, and all I can do is nod or I'm going to end up getting all choked up and embarrass Vitaly. Alina is Roman's sister, and I know how hard these last two years have been for him, but he's stepped aside, letting me have Konstantin and letting me take the lead on this, and I'll always be grateful to him for it.

"Aren't you a little overdressed?" Lev asks, walking over to Dominic. "I'd hate it if you got shot again because you couldn't maneuver around easily in your expensive suit."

Dominic eyes the five of us. Danil and Roman are in casual suits, but Lev and Vitaly are wearing jeans and long-sleeve tees, while I'm in my usual jeans and dark hoodie.

"I thought it best to not draw so much attention," he finally says. "And I can move just fine. No way in fuck am I taking another bullet tonight."

Vitaly laughs. "Oh, we're definitely going to be drawing some attention tonight, but it's not going to be from our casual attire."

Lev cuts in and adds, "And I really hope you don't take another bullet because we all know how you're still bitching about the last one you took."

Dominic laughs and rubs his shoulder. "You know, it aches when it's about to rain. I feel like a fucking eighty-year-old man."

Lev laughs and smacks him on the back. "It'll be a fun story to tell your grandkids one day."

"What fucking grandkids?" Dominic shakes his head at Lev and then checks his phone. "My men are all in position. We're ready when you are."

We've joined forces with the Alessi mafia for tonight. Our men will be working and killing together, and we've set things up so there will be teams hitting the mansion at the same time as we're taking out everyone in the club. The Lebedev Bratva dies tonight.

"We're ready," I tell him.

He says something to the men around him in Italian before they start walking towards the club. Stepping closer to me he says, "I'm jealous of the revenge you'll be getting, Matvey. I can't wait until it's my turn."

He and I have both been consumed with our need for revenge, and I know it's killing him to not know who killed his sister. Danil's been searching for a name, but it's a slow process and Dominic is handling patience about as well as I've been.

"You'll get yours soon," I tell him.

"I fucking hope so. Tonight will make me feel a little bit better, though."

We're all looking forward to getting our hands bloody, and when we start walking towards the club, I can feel the anticipation, the almost giddy desire welling up around us. By the time we reach the front of the building, Konstantin's five men have already been quietly taken out, leaving the idiot bouncer as the only thing standing in between us and the front door.

"Hey, Robbie," Danil says, taking the lead and giving the man a grin. "We're Konstantin's guests tonight."

Robbie's not a small man, but he's no match for us and the mention of Konstantin has him paling a bit. He gives a quick nod and steps aside, too stupid and trusting to frisk us. It's a mistake he won't live very long to regret. As soon as it's time, he'll be getting a quick bullet to the head by one of the men we have ready and waiting along the back of the building.

Stepping into the club, I ignore the way the crowded interior makes my skin crawl. The pain from my burn scars may have finally disappeared, but small, crowded places like this always bring the memories back. I scan the room, and even though I know exactly where Alina's going to be, I still search every dark corner for her. Instead of her familiar blue-green eyes, I see several of our men in the crowd. They've positioned themselves near the men Konstantin brought with him, and they're also stationed around the exits. No one is leaving this club without going through us first.

Dominic and his men veer off in the opposite direction, easily blending into the crowd like they've done it a million times before. They'll stay hidden until it's time to start killing, which I'm guessing won't be too long from now.

"You going to be okay?" Vitaly asks from beside me as he waves away one of the women working here. It's still strange to see Vitaly turning away women, but ever since he married Katya, he hasn't even looked at anyone else.

"I'll be fine." I meet his eyes, and when it's obvious he's still worried I'm going to lose control, I add, "I won't fuck this up."

He nods and when he looks ahead of us, I can tell the exact moment he sees her. His mouth tightens, his eyes narrow slightly, and his entire body goes still. “Fuck,” he groans, and when I turn my head and meet Alina’s eyes for the first time in two years, I almost fall to my goddamn knees. The look only lasts a second before the crowd closes in again and there are too many people blocking my view of her, but that one second was enough. The hope and longing in her eyes is an image I’ll never forget, and underneath it had been a shame and embarrassment that I can’t wait to free her of because she has absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. None of this is her fault, and I’ll happily spend the rest of my life convincing her of that.

“Want some company?”

The topless blonde who’s just walked up to me gives me a huge smile and starts to reach for my arm, but I quickly jerk away from her.

“No.”

She backs up at the tone of my voice. I’m not trying to scare her, but I don’t want her touching me, and I sure as fuck don’t want her hanging around me or trying to sit in my lap.

“That’s a no for me, too,” I hear Vitaly say from behind me. I know the rest of my brothers will be saying the same thing. I’d be concerned about our lack of interest in any of these women raising red flags if we were going to be spending any length of time here tonight, but most of these fucks will be dead before anyone can get suspicious. Playing nice with Konstantin while we sit down and have several drinks together was never an option. Honestly, I’ll be lucky to last three minutes with this fucker.

When I walk over to the table in the corner and get my first up-close view of Alina on her knees with a fucking collar around her neck, I realize I may not even last sixty goddamn seconds. I take the seat next to him, putting Alina so close to me I could reach out and touch her. I’m forced to keep my hands in tight fists to resist the urge to pull her into my lap.

“Glad you could make it,” Konstantin says, and then he puts his hand on Alina’s head and starts to pet her.

I can’t take my eyes off the way he’s stroking her hair while Vitaly says, “I told my brothers they needed to see your pet in person.”

“Isn’t she beautiful?”

The tone of his voice has me raising my eyes to his. The fucker talks as if he’s the one responsible for how beautiful and perfect she is, as if he had

anything to do with it. He shouldn't be allowed to breathe the same air as her, let alone touch a single hair on her head.

"She is," Roman says, and I know him well enough to hear the pain in his voice.

Konstantin gives a soft laugh. "She's usually so well behaved, but earlier she decided to get mouthy, so I'll be punishing her later as part of the entertainment."

"Really?" David asks, his interest immediately piqued at the thought of seeing a woman suffer.

"Will you allow others to join in?" Aaron asks.

"No."

The tone makes it obvious that Aaron had better not ask again while Osip laughs and shakes his head.

"He never shares her."

I look over at Osip. He's trying hard to look like he doesn't care, but there's something there. Jealousy, anger at being denied something he wants, and beyond that there's something else hiding behind the slight smirk he's giving. I don't know what it is, but I'll be finding out soon enough.

Waitresses come over with shots of vodka and whiskey, and I quickly down one, waving away the woman who makes it clear she'd like to sit in my lap.

"You don't want company tonight?" Konstantin asks, noticing that we've all declined lap dances.

Lev laughs and takes another shot. "The night is early. There's plenty of time for women later."

Before he can ask anything else, a loud voice calls for Roman right before Emily's dad walks over with three congressmen and several naked women. They're laughing and groping the tits and asses they've surrounded themselves with, looking every bit like the jackasses they are.

"Glad you could come, Chris," Roman says to his father-in-law, visibly cheering up at the knowledge that he'll finally get to kill him soon.

Pulling up some chairs, they join our group. Their loud laughter and jokes mix with the too-loud music, threatening to make my fucking head explode. Even though I've been looking around the club, my attention has never wavered from Alina. She's kept her head down, no doubt it's one of Konstantin's many rules for her, but I can see the way her body is shaking.

My eyes run over the spine that's way too obvious, the bare knees that are pressed against the hard, dirty floor, and the heels that must be killing her feet. When I spot the bruises through the lacy dress, everything starts to harden inside me. They're along her hips, exactly where he'd be grabbing her if he were holding her still while he forced himself on her, while he forced himself *inside* her, and that thought has me seeing red.

I use the very last of my restraint to look over at my brothers. It's the only warning I give, but it's enough for them to reach for their guns before I grab the hand that keeps petting *my* woman. Konstantin's eyes widen in surprise. No doubt it's the first time anyone's dared to stop him from doing anything. He might want to get used to not being in control. Whatever future he has left is going to be for me to decide.

"What the fuck?"

I ignore his question and point my gun at his arrogant face while I wrap my other arm around Alina and pull her behind me, shielding her body with mine. She clutches at my waist and whispers my name right before gunshots ring out and everything goes to shit. David's head explodes right before Lev shoots Aaron in the dick, making him suffer for the time he hurt Jolene. Chris looks over and screams as loud as the woman in his lap. The bullet Roman puts between his eyes cuts the scream off while Danil and Vitaly take out the congressmen. Finally, Lev shoots Aaron in the head, ending his suffering and silencing the annoying screams of pain. The women fall to the floor, covering their heads and praying the next bullet won't be aimed at them.

"Don't fucking move," I tell Konstantin when his hand starts to creep inside his suit.

"That goes for you, too," Lev hollers at Osip, training his gun on him.

Two of our men run up behind them. I keep my gun aimed at Konstantin until his hands are securely zip-tied behind his back and I know there's no way in fuck either one of them can move. With gunshots still going off, Alina clutches at my waist, shaking so badly I'm surprised she's still managing to balance on those damn heels. She fists my hoodie as I angle her to the side even more so she's in between me and the wall and her body is completely hidden by mine. I keep my arm behind me and against her small body, so fucking grateful to be touching her again.

Looking around at the chaos, I spot one of Konstantin's men and quickly shoot him before he can aim his gun at Vitaly, who's busy shooting

one of the customers who felt it was his duty to try and interfere. I scan the dark club, looking for my other brothers. With the music still blaring and the women still screaming, it's impossible to hear anything above the mayhem. Roman is in the center of the room with Timofey, taking out a Lebedev enforcer while Lev pushes through the crowd on the right, and Danil punches another overzealous customer.

"Lev, get down!"

I have just enough time to turn my head at the sound of Dominic's voice before I see Lev duck his head right as Dominic fires his gun, killing the man who'd just been aiming at Lev from the dark corner. The relief at knowing Lev is okay is short lived, because as soon as I look up, I see one of Konstantin's men aiming a gun at me from the center of the room. There isn't time to do anything except pull Alina down in case the bullet passes through me. I don't even get the chance to tell her I love her before I hear the gun go off right as Roman throws himself in front of us.

"Roman!"

Alina's screams echo through the air as Roman falls to the ground and one more shot goes off. I don't need to look up to know the shooter's been killed. Falling to my knees, I press against Roman's chest, trying to staunch the blood that's pouring out of him way too fucking quickly.

"Roman, stay with me," I shout at him. "Don't you fucking die on me, brother!" Lifting my head I shout for Dominic to get his doctor. Lev and Vitaly come running over, followed by Danil and Dominic.

"He'll be here in a few minutes," Dominic says, shoving his phone back in this pocket.

Roman groans and then grimaces when I press harder. "Are you trying to fucking kill me?"

"I should for that stunt you just pulled."

He tries to laugh but can't manage it. Turning from me, he looks at Alina and smiles at her. He lifts a bloody hand and cups her face. "I'm sorry it took so long to find you. We tried so fucking hard."

Alina squeezes his hand while tears stream down her face. "I knew you'd find me." She starts to sob as she whispers, "I'm so sorry. Don't leave me, Roman. I can't lose you again."

Roman tries to say something, but I can tell he's about to pass out. Lev gently pats his face, trying to keep him conscious.

“Stay awake, brother.” He gives a forced laugh. “Emily is going to kick our asses for this.”

“Fuck yes she is,” Vitaly agrees. “So thanks for getting your ass shot, Roman. We’re never going to live this down.”

“Sorry,” Roman whispers.

The music is too goddamn loud to hear him, but his lips are easy enough to read. I lift my head and yell, “Someone turn off the fucking music!”

When the song cuts off, the silence is deafening. We hear the doctor on Dominic’s payroll come rushing in, and when he sees Roman, he immediately gets to work. He says something in Italian as he checks for an exit wound and then starts packing the wound and using a pressure bandage. Three other Alessi men come over. They’ve got a stretcher ready to go, and within minutes Roman is on the damn thing and being rushed out of the room. Lev kisses the top of Alina’s head and Danil gives her a quick hug before they run to catch up with Roman, and I know they’ll text us as soon as they know anything.

“Where are you taking him?” Alina asks.

She’s still crying and clutching my arm, and when I feel her body start to shake again, I pull my hoodie off and start to put it on her. I’m still wearing a T-shirt, but Dominic eyes the burn scars on my arms, only hesitating for a second before saying, “We have a room outfitted for surgery at my house. He’ll be safe there.”

Alina threads her arms through the hoodie that’s way too big for her, and when her head pokes through the top, our eyes finally meet. “Matvey,” she whispers and then starts crying again. Everything comes crashing down on her, and when I feel her legs start to buckle, I pick her up and hold her against me.

Vitaly pats her back and gives her shoulder a squeeze. “It’s good to have you back, Alina. We’ve missed the hell out of you, little sis.”

She starts to cry harder when he walks away with Dominic to give us some privacy and to help make sure the club is secure. The men are being forced onto their knees in a line near the back wall while the women are being herded into the back. They’ll be taken to a safe house that Dominic owns for now until we can get them back to their families.

She’s still crying, but I can’t stand the sight of that fucking collar on her for one more goddamn second. Setting her back down, I pull my knife out and gently push her hair aside. “Don’t move, baby,” I tell her, slipping the

blade under the leather. Using my other hand, I keep it secure so it won't dig into her skin any more than it already is. The blade is sharp, easily cutting through the collar, and when she feels it fall from her neck, she lets out a soft, shaky breath. Putting my knife away, I pull her back against me.

"I've got you, *malishka*," I whisper against her neck, breathing in the scent that I feared I'd never smell again. She's crying too hard to speak, but I feel her nod her head as she tightens her arms around me. "I'm never fucking letting you go."

"How fucking sweet."

Her body freezes at the sound of Konstantin's voice.

"I don't know what the fuck you think you're doing," he continues, "but you're not going to get away with it."

I turn to face him, eyeing him on his knees with his hands zip-tied behind his back. "We already have."

He laughs, and I've never wanted to cut someone's mouth off so badly in my life.

"I take it you know Nadia."

"That's not her name, you stupid fuck." I keep my arms tight around Alina, refusing to turn even slightly, because I don't ever want her to have to look at him again.

"Doesn't matter what your name is, does it, pet?"

She flinches at his words, and I stroke her back and kiss her cheek.

"I'd shut the fuck up if I were you," Vitaly tells him. "Your death is already going to be a slow one."

Konstantin laughs again. "Killing me won't change the fact that I've been fucking the girl you love for the last two years." He smiles at me and runs his eyes over Alina. "In fact, we fucked right before we came here tonight, didn't we, sweetheart? I bet she still feels me sliding down her goddamn thighs."

Alina lets out another sob and buries her face in my neck as Vitaly pistol-whips the fucker, knocking him out so she doesn't have to hear another goddamn word from the bastard. Osip watches and wisely keeps his mouth shut.

"I'm so sorry," she whispers against my skin.

I cup her head and bring my lips to her ear. "That's the last apology I ever want to hear from you, *malishka*. You don't ever need to say those words to me."

She nods, but she's still crying when she peeks over my shoulder and sees the line of kneeling men. "What are you going to do with them?"

"We're killing them. If they're at this club, then they're involved in sex trafficking. None of them are walking out of here. Once they're dead, we're setting the building on fire."

"What about the rest of Konstantin's men?"

"We have two teams over at his mansion now. They're under orders to kill every last Lebedev man. The women will be brought back to their families and given money. We're doing the same for the women here tonight."

"And Konstantin and Osip?"

"Will die very slowly."

"Good," she whispers. When I start to walk her out, she pulls back and looks at me. "No, I want to see."

I hesitate for just a second, but there's no way in hell I can deny her anything, so all I ask is, "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

I trust her at her word and nod to Vitaly who motions for the others to get ready. Keeping my arm securely under Alina's ass so she's in no danger of falling, I carry her to the end of the line and raise my gun, shooting them in the head one bastard at a time. Some of the men yell and try to scramble away, but there's nowhere for them to run to. Their hands are zip-tied, and they're surrounded. The only decision they're making is whether they want to die where they're kneeling or sprawled on their stomachs as they try to crawl away. It makes no fucking difference to me.

Alina tenses at the loud gunshots, but she doesn't look away. She watches me shoot them, and when I need to reload, she watches Vitaly take over until every single one of them is dead. She looks at the men on the floor, and it's painfully obvious that the Alina I lost almost two years ago is not the same woman I got back tonight. She's been changed by everything that's happened to her, but I don't care. I love her, all of her, no matter what.

Some of Dominic's men come in with gas cans, and when they start pouring it out on the ground, I head for the front door, and this time Alina doesn't stop me. Her hand is pressed against my scarred back, and she knows I have no desire to stand in a burning building ever fucking again.

Timofey and Alexei drag Konstantin and Osip out of the club, hauling their asses into a waiting SUV. They'll both be thrilled to learn we're going

to be torturing them at their posh mansion. It's the perfect location, and it'll be easier to keep guards there than at the abandoned warehouse we usually use for such things. We won't have to stop torturing if we get hungry, and it'll be easy to jump in the shower and wipe off all the blood before we drive home.

The women have already been taken out of the club, so as soon as the place is soaked in gasoline, the others come out and one of our guys lights it up. With the amount of gasoline and alcohol, it doesn't take long before the place is engulfed in flames and the windows are blowing out.

"About fucking time," Vitaly mutters from beside us, watching the fire spread with a grin on his face. He laughs and nudges Dominic's shoulder when he walks over to stand beside us. "Thanks for saving Lev's life."

Dominic shrugs. "I was going to be a gentleman and never speak of it."

Vitaly laughs. "Yeah right. You saved him just so you could hold it over his head for the rest of his life."

Dominic smiles. "Maybe." He looks over at Alina. "It's nice to finally meet you. I'm Dominic."

Alina nods at him and asks, "What did your doctor tell you about Roman?"

Dominic rubs the back of his neck, and I can tell he doesn't want to answer, but when he sees the look on my face, he tells her the truth.

"He said he'd lost a lot of blood and that he needed to do emergency surgery, but he said it didn't look like a fatal shot." Wanting to reassure her, he adds, "He's an excellent doctor. He's saved my life and the lives of my men more times than I can remember, and the room I set up for him at my house is better than any hospital in the city."

"Thank you." Alina rests her head against my shoulder again, and I know she must be exhausted.

"I'm getting her out of here," I tell them, already walking her toward the SUV we came in.

Vitaly catches up to us after giving Timofey a few more final orders. "I'm coming with you. I want to be there when you tell Emily, and I need to reassure my wife that my fine ass is safe."

"Did you really marry their sister?" Alina asks him.

Vitaly looks over at her. "I did. She's not like them, though. She hates her brothers."

“I know she isn’t,” she whispers. She waits a few seconds before asking, “Since when do you work with the Italians?”

“That’s a long story,” I tell her while Vitaly gives a soft laugh. “We found out that we were both hunting the same Bratva. Dominic’s sister was kidnapped while in Italy, and then her body was found not too long after. We decided to work together to find them and bring them down.”

“But how did you find out about his sister?”

Her body tenses, growing agitated while I kick myself for making her even more upset. I know she’s confused and hurt and scared and overwhelmed by everything, and all I want is to take it all away. “We have plenty of time to explain everything.” I kiss her forehead. “It’s time to go home, Alina.”

I’ve waited so fucking long to say those words to her, and when I tighten my arms around her and get in the backseat, keeping her on my lap, she doesn’t try to move away. The truth is I’m not sure I’m ever going to be able to let her out of my arms again.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 3

Alina

Matvey's arms tighten around me, holding me closer and making me feel safe for the first time since I was taken. Having him so close is a torment and a blessing. My head is reeling with everything that's happened, and I don't know how to sort through it all. I want to stay right where I'm at with my head resting on his shoulder, breathing in his familiar scent and feeling safe in his arms, but another part of me wants to scramble off his lap and curl into a ball on the floor by his feet, because mixed with Matvey's scent is the lingering smell of Konstantin—a spicy sandalwood scent that always triggers my gag reflex and makes my heart start racing when I smell it. My fingers itch to claw at my skin, wanting to rid myself of his touch, of his smell, and of all the fucking memories that are ingrained on my body.

"It's okay, *malishka*," Matvey murmurs in my ear when he feels me start to shake again. "You're safe now."

I nod my head, but even though my body is safe now, my mind isn't, and I'm scared it won't ever be again. Matvey rubs my back while Vitaly drives us to a home I've never been to and a thousand worries rush through my mind. I keep thinking about Roman, worried that I found my brother only to lose him again. He jumped in front of that gun, taking the bullet that was meant for me and Matvey without a second thought, and it's exactly the kind of thing he would do. Roman's always looked out for me. He was the one who woke up early to make sure I was ready for school on time, and he's the one who always made sure I had something to eat, even if it meant he went without. He's always taken care of me, and I can't imagine my life without him.

Matvey feels the tears on his neck before he kisses my cheek and cups the back of my head. I'm not at all surprised when he whispers, "Roman's going to be fine, baby. Lev and Danil will let us know as soon as he's out of surgery."

"What if he doesn't make it?" My voice cracks at the thought, and I have to push the thought aside or I'll completely lose it.

"He will. I promise you, Alina, he's going to be fine. No way in hell is he going to give up now, not when he's just found you and his wife is about to give birth. He has a lot to live for, and you know his stubborn ass isn't going to just give up."

The corner of my mouth lifts at the idea of my big brother giving up on anything. "He is stubborn," I admit.

"Fuck yes he is," Vitaly says from up front, not sounding even slightly embarrassed about listening in. "Remember that time when we were twelve and he made us stay up all fucking night to finish playing Monopoly because he was convinced he could win?"

I feel Matvey's deep laugh vibrate against my chest while I finish the story we all know so well. "But then he felt bad about how excited I was, so he lost on purpose and let me win."

"And then Lev introduced you to those goddamn racing games, and you've been winning ever since," Vitaly says.

"It's been a long time since I played. I doubt I'm still any good."

Matvey kisses my forehead. "We'll have to find out when you feel up to it."

A few minutes later, Vitaly pulls into a parking garage beneath a huge building that's lit up right in the heart of the city. He pulls into a reserved space between a black Camaro and a black Porsche, and I suddenly start to feel nervous again.

Before we get out, Vitaly sends a text to Lev for an update, and when he gets a response, he looks back at us. "He's still in surgery, but the doctor sent someone out to tell them everything looks good and he should be done soon." Vitaly sighs and gives a soft laugh. "Thank fuck. Now I just need to go in there and convey all this to Emily without her going into early labor. That's not going to be easy. You know how dramatic she can be."

Matvey smiles and shakes his head. "Yeah, *she's* the dramatic one."

"I don't know what the fuck you're trying to say, brother," Vitaly says, getting out and shutting the door before Matvey can answer.

I watch him walk to the private elevator before disappearing inside. “He’s still exactly the same.”

“He is in many ways,” Matvey agrees, making no move to open the door. Threading his fingers through my hair, he cups the back of my head and hugs me. That’s all he does. He just hugs me, holding me against him until I feel my body start to relax again.

“There are so many things I want to say to you,” he whispers, and the sound of his voice has me tearing up again. I’ve missed it so damn much, the raspy sound that’s so unique to him and so fucking familiar to me. “But I know that it’s too much to get into right now and that you’re exhausted. I don’t want to push you or overwhelm you, but I need you to know that I never once stopped looking for you. Ever since the day you went missing, I’ve thought of nothing else except finding you, and I’m so fucking sorry, *malishka*.”

His voice cracks, and I immediately tighten my arms around him. “It’s not your fault.”

“I was late, and I wasn’t there when you needed me, and I’ll never forgive myself for it.”

“It’s not your fault,” I repeat. The pain in his voice is like a knife to my chest, and it breaks what’s left of my heart. When I start to cry again, he rubs my back and kisses my forehead.

“Please don’t worry about trying to make me feel better. God, baby, that’s the last thing I want you thinking about. You don’t need to worry about anything ever again, because I’m going to take care of you, Alina. For the rest of my fucking life, I’m going to love you and take care of you.”

I nod because I’m crying too hard to speak, and when he opens the door, he keeps me in his arms as he gets out. We’re almost to the elevator when it opens and a very pregnant woman comes rushing out followed by Vitaly and Katya. She sees me and brings her hand to her mouth. She’s crying and looks scared to death when she reaches out and squeezes my arm.

“I’m so glad you’re safe, Alina, and I promise we’ll talk later, but I have to see Roman. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” I quickly tell her, knowing this must be my sister-in-law. I can’t believe my brother is married and about to be a daddy. I’ve missed so goddamn much.

With one last squeeze, she races past me while Vitaly sighs and yells, “Don’t run, Emily!”

Katya stops and looks like she wants to say something, but at the last second, she ducks her head and runs to catch up to Vitaly.

“She feels terrible about everything,” Matvey explains, walking into the elevator and hitting the button for the top floor. “She still blames herself for not being able to help you.”

“It’s not her fault. I never once blamed her.”

“We all told her you wouldn’t, but it’s not easy for her to believe.”

When the doors open and I see the wall of photographs, all I can do is stare. The men who have been with me since I was born, fill the frames in front of me, and as familiar as their faces are to me, the women they’re clearly head over heels in love with are complete strangers to me. It’s such a surreal feeling to be so completely on the outside of the only family I’ve ever loved and known.

Matvey sets me down, and I look at the photo in front of me. I run my eyes over my brother and then Vitaly, Lev, and Danil, before stopping at Matvey’s handsome face. He’s the only one who’s by himself in every single photo—a part of the group but also outside it. His smiles aren’t quite as big as everyone else’s, and I’m ashamed at how happy it makes me. It’s selfish and cruel to be happy that he was alone, but I know I couldn’t handle seeing him with another woman. I don’t want to know if there were women while I was away. I don’t want to know if he sought comfort in someone else’s arms. It would break me to know that he had, and I hate myself for it because I love him so damn much, and I don’t like the idea of him being miserable, but the truth is I’d rather he be miserable than with someone else, and god that makes me feel like a horrible person.

Ashamed of everything I’m feeling, I turn away to see two women staring at me from the kitchen. The penthouse is huge and the floor plan is open, giving me a view of the kitchen and living room and a set of stairs to the left. I recognize the women from the photos. One is Lev’s wife, and the other is Danil’s.

“Hi, I’m Simona,” Danil’s wife says, giving me a smile.

“I’m Jolene,” Lev’s wife says, adding in a small wave. “It’s so good to finally meet you, Alina.”

I smile at them as Matvey puts an arm around my shoulders and pulls me closer. I look up at him and whisper, “I really want a shower, Matvey.” Everything’s happening so quickly, and memories from earlier come crashing in. I feel disgusting and tired and unsure of my place here.

“Of course.” He kisses my head and starts to lead me to the set of stairs. “I’m going to get her situated. She’s exhausted and needs to rest.”

Jolene quickly says, “Let us know if you need anything at all.”

“Clothes or food or whatever you want,” Simona adds, keeping one hand on her pregnant belly. It’s hard to tell if Jolene is pregnant, but it looks like the guys didn’t waste any time starting families, and the idea of them all being parents soon is hard for me to wrap my brain around. The last time I saw them they were all bachelors and really fucking happy about it. So much has changed in two years.

I follow Matvey down the stairs, stopping to take off these ridiculous heels once we’re in the hallway. He points to a couple of doors, saying they're Danil and Simona’s, and then we walk past a game room with a pool table and a large couch, until finally stopping outside Matvey’s room. He opens the door, stepping aside so I can walk in, and what I see stuns me into silence.

Wrapping my arms around my body, I turn in a slow circle, seeing so many of my things mixed in with Matvey’s. There’s a bookshelf in the corner with all my favorite books, including the set of fantasy novels he’d gotten me for my eighteenth birthday. There are framed photos of us scattered throughout the room, and when I walk over to the closet, my clothes are mixed in with his.

“Matvey,” I whisper, turning around to look at him. He’s watching me, one hand gripping the back of his neck and an apprehensive look on his face like he’s waiting to see if I’ll break down again.

“I wanted you to have your things when we found you.” He gives me a soft smile and scrubs his hand along his jaw. “And surrounding myself with pieces of you made it a little easier to breathe.”

My throat tightens at his words, and my eyes start to fill with tears again. I want to run to him, to throw myself in his arms and never leave, but my skin burns with the memory of Konstantin and his brutal touch, and I want him off me. I feel tainted. I want a hot shower, and I want to scrub him away—two things that have been denied me for far too long.

“I want a shower,” I say, grabbing some of my clothes from the hangers. “I need to get clean.”

“Of course. Everything is already in there. Just holler if you need me.”

I nod and step into the bathroom, shutting the door behind me because I can’t bear the thought of anyone watching me, not even Matvey. He wasn’t

lying about everything being in here. My favorite shampoo and conditioner are lined up on the shelf in the shower right next to his. He even has my body wash and the pink pouf I always used. I don't know if it's all the same or if he just bought everything new, and I don't care. It's so fucking sweet that I start crying again.

Turning the water on as hot as I can stand it, I quickly undress and step under the spray, drenching myself with the cleansing water. Grabbing the pouf, I cover it in body wash and spend the next several minutes scrubbing myself from head to toe. I don't stop until my skin is red and raw and the water grows tepid. Using the last of the warm water, I wash my hair, only stepping out when the water turns cold.

Wrapping myself in a towel, I grab the pink toothbrush that's waiting for me right next to Matvey's blue one. I brush my teeth until my gums are bleeding, and then I ignore the painful burn and use mouthwash. I want every trace of that fucker gone. When I'm as clean as I'm going to get, I pull on the comfy flannel pajama bottoms and the matching shirt. With my hair still damp, I step out of the bathroom, not at all surprised to find Matvey sitting on the edge of the bed, waiting for me. He lifts his head when he hears me, his dark eyes searching to make sure I'm okay.

"Roman's out of surgery. He's doing fine, but the doctor is keeping him sedated so he'll sleep through the night. Emily freaked out and started having contractions, so she's also on forced bedrest right next to him."

"She'll be okay though?"

"Yeah, he said she'll be fine. She just needs to try and take it easy. Lev and Danil are going to stay there a while longer, and Vitaly said he and Katya needed to handle a very important errand, so there's no telling what in the hell he's up to."

I'm still standing by the bathroom door with my arms wrapped around my chest, not quite sure what I should be doing when he stands and takes a step closer, stopping when there's still a few feet between us.

"Do you think you could eat something?" His eyes run over me. "You're way too thin, Alina. When is the last time you ate?"

I think about the bowl of plain oatmeal he made me eat on all fours this morning like a fucking dog and quickly shake my head, feeling it threaten to come right back up. "I'm not hungry."

He looks like he wants to argue, but instead he gives a soft nod and gestures to the bed. "You need to get some sleep then. We can worry about

food tomorrow."

There was a time when I would've jumped in that bed and pulled him down right along with me, but now I'm frozen in place, unable to close the distance. The thought of such an intimate position has my mind racing back to Konstantin, and he's the last fucking thing I want to be thinking about, but I also can't stop myself from asking, "Where is he?"

There's no need for me to explain who *he* is. Matvey sighs and says, "He's being held at his mansion."

"And then what?"

"I'm going to slowly kill him and his brother."

I'm not bothered by what he's said. Not too long ago violence would've upset me, when the thought of the man I love killing someone wouldn't have sat well with me, but those days are long gone. I always knew my brothers and Matvey were involved in the Safronov Bratva, but they were all very careful to keep me as far away from it as possible. I never really knew what they did or what they were capable of. I'm not the only thing that's changed drastically in the last two years. They run the Melnikov Bratva now, and based on what I saw tonight, they're damn good at it. They've become ruthless, hardened killers who aren't afraid to get their hands bloody, and that's exactly who I need them to be. My concern isn't that the man I love is planning on torturing two men to death. My only concern is that it somehow might not get to happen.

"What if they escape?"

"They won't. They're heavily guarded and chained up. No way in hell are they getting free."

"What about everyone else that's involved in this?"

"We've been working on a plan for a while now. You know Danil, there's always a plan and then a few others in case the first one doesn't work."

I give a soft laugh because it's so accurate.

"We can talk more about this tomorrow. I don't want you worrying about any of it." He closes the distance and gently cups my face. "All you need to know is that you never have to see them again and that they will regret everything that was done to you."

It's enough for now, so I let it go, because he's right, I'm fucking exhausted. I haven't had an actual restful night of sleep since the last night we spent together.

“Tell me what you need from me, *malishka*.” He kisses my forehead, keeping his lips pressed against my skin for several seconds. “If you want me to leave, I’ll leave and stand guard outside your door. If you want me to sit in the chair and watch over you while you sleep, I will. If you want me to hold you, I will. I’ll do anything you want.”

A big part of me wants to curl up in bed with his strong body wrapped around mine, but when I start to think about how close our bodies would be, a fear starts to take root deep within me, and I’m shaking my head no before I can even voice it.

“Can you sit in the chair?” I don’t meet his eyes when he pulls back because I don’t want to see the disappointment in them. “I don’t want to be alone.”

“Look at me, baby.”

He waits until my eyes meet his, and instead of the disappointment I feared, there’s nothing but love in them.

“You have no idea how happy it makes me just to be in the same room as you. I will happily sleep in the chair or on the floor or wherever the hell you’ll allow me to be. I just want to be near you, Alina. That’s all I need.”

I nod, willing myself to not start crying again. He leads me to the large bed, pulling back the covers for me, and when I crawl in and he tucks me in, I curl onto my side and hug one of the pillows against my chest. Everything smells like him, and the comforting citrusy scent of Matvey’s cologne mixes so perfectly with his own unique scent and I can’t help but press my face against the pillowcase and breathe him in as deeply as I can.

He kisses my temple, and when he starts to stand up, I grab his hand, holding him in place. “Wait, please. Can you sit here instead?”

He smiles down at me and brushes back the hair that’s fallen across my cheek. “I’ll sit here as long as you need me.”

He cups my hand in both of his, stroking my skin with his thumb, and the feel of his scarred palms is so damn comforting that my eyes start to drift closed. I can’t resist the feel of a comfortable bed, warm blankets, and the security of Matvey standing watch and keeping me safe. I’m asleep in minutes, and it feels like I’ve just closed my eyes when I’m right back in that fucking bedroom with Konstantin.

“Did I say you could eat yet?” he growls at me, fisting my hair and lifting my head from the plate of food he’s set on the floor in front of me.

“No, sir,” I whisper, so fucking hungry my stomach is in knots.

“You want your mouth stuffed with something?” He grins and unbuttons his pants. “Then you can stuff it with this.”

He forces himself into my mouth as I choke and gag around him. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters. He’s going to do what he wants to me, and there’s not a goddamn thing I can do to stop it. I scream in my head, loud, ragged cries that are never allowed to leave my lips. He uses me, wearing me down until there’s nothing left of the woman I once was. I’m no longer Alina. I’m nothing except his pet, his unwilling toy, and he’s never going to let me go.

When he’s close, I start to gag again, choking and growing lightheaded because he won’t let me get a breath. I know I’m going to pass out, and I know he won’t care when I do, and I just wish it would all end because I don’t know how much more of this I can take.

“Alina!”

Matvey’s ragged voice pulls me from my dream. My throat hurts, even though I know I haven’t made a sound, and when I dart my eyes around the room, it takes me a second to realize I’m not still being held by Konstantin. I’m safe. I’m with Matvey, and I’m safe.

“Jesus, baby,” Matvey groans, pulling me into his arms as I sob against his chest. “It’s okay. You’re safe now.”

He repeats the words over and over again while he rubs my back and rocks me in his arms like I’m a small child who’s just woken from a nightmare and not a grown woman covered in sweat and shaking so badly my teeth are chattering.

“I’ll never be rid of him,” I whisper against his chest, clenching my hands into fists so tightly I can feel my nails digging into my palms.

“You will, baby. I promise you will. It’s just going to take time.”

Looking down at my hands, the viper tattoo seems even more prominent than usual, and when I start to claw at it, Matvey gently rests his hand on mine, stopping me from breaking the skin.

“Don’t hurt yourself, *malishka*.”

“I hate it,” I hiss, my words broken because I’m still crying uncontrollably. “I fucking hate it, and I hate him. I can’t get him out of my fucking head.”

Keeping my hand in his, he tightens his other arm around me and keeps me pressed against his chest as he positions himself so he’s resting against

the headboard with me securely in his lap. He strokes my hair and kisses my forehead while I cry against his shoulder.

“We’ll get the tattoo removed, and we can find you someone to talk to, someone who can help you through this. It’s going to take time, Alina, but I promise you’re going to get through this.”

I don’t say anything, because I don’t know what to say. I don’t want to weigh him down with my fears. I don’t want to tell him that I can’t be fixed and that he shouldn’t waste his time trying. I just let him hold me, taking comfort from his touch and the feel of his body against mine.

“Do you want me to read to you?”

I lift my head and look at him. “What?”

“Do you remember after the fire when you would sneak out and come and visit me in the hospital? You always read to me, and it helped. It gave me something to focus on instead of the pain. You’ve always been there for me, Alina, for as long as I can remember, and I love you so goddamn much for it, but now it’s my turn to take care of you.”

He reaches over and grabs a book from the nightstand. I recognize it immediately. It’s the fantasy book I was reading when I’d been taken. I’d left it in Matvey’s room since I spent every night in there anyway, and he’d kept it and brought it with him to America.

“Do you remember where you left off, or do you want me to start at the beginning?”

“The beginning,” I whisper, but it’s not because I don’t remember. It’s because I want to hear his voice for as long as possible. I get comfortable, resting my head against his chest, feeling the beat of his heart and then the deep, raspy sound of his voice as he starts from the very beginning. The familiar sound of him speaking Russian calms me as he continues to stroke my hair while he reads.

It takes me a long time to fall back asleep, but he doesn’t stop reading until I do. I don’t wake until the sun is streaming in the large floor-to-ceiling windows that we forgot to close last night. I’m still resting against Matvey’s chest and for a few seconds I keep my eyes closed, listening to the beat of his heart and reminding myself yet again that I’m safe. I’m not waking up on the hard floor, huddled into a ball, naked and cold. I’m surrounded by the man I love and in a warm bed and, aside from the memories that still haunt me, nothing can ever hurt me again.

Matvey’s tattooed forearm is still wrapped around me. I run my eyes over the tanned skin, noticing every detail of the colorful flame tattoos that cover his burn scars. He’s added onto them, the flames trailing down the length of his arm now, and it makes me curious what else he’s added. He’s definitely added several pounds of muscle to what was already a pretty damn perfect physique. I used to know every inch of him, and now I don’t even know what he looks like with his shirt off and it breaks my heart a little bit. When I reach out and trace my finger along one of his veins, he immediately wakes.

“*Malishka*, are you okay?”

His voice is thick with sleep, the same deep, sexy timbre it always is, and when he shifts his weight and I feel the hard length of him, everything comes crashing back down on me, reminding me that nothing is the same and that it never will be again. He feels me tense and lets out a sigh before kissing the top of my head.

“I’m sorry, baby. Here,” he says, moving me off his lap so I’m still cuddled up against him but no longer feeling his powerful morning erection. It kills me that we never got to experience our first time together. It’s all I wanted. It’s all I ever wanted. I never asked for much out of life—I just wanted Matvey, a quiet life together, and a big family when the time was right.

“You’re all I ever wanted,” I tell him, keeping my head down and pressed against his chest.

“You have me, Alina. You’ve always had me, and you always will.”

“I wanted you to be my first, Matvey.” I clutch at his shirt, remembering what my first time had been like with Konstantin, the pain and fear and so much fucking blood. “You would’ve been so gentle,” I whisper.

He cups my head and lets out a shaky breath. “I regret so many things. I regret asking you to wait because I thought you were too young, I regret not being there on time to meet you, and I regret not being able to find you faster and save you from that fucking monster. I’m so sorry it took me so long. I’m so sorry he hurt you.”

“I wanted you to be my first, and I wanted to be yours.” My throat tightens at the thought of another woman getting to share that with him.

He's silent for so long that I’m afraid I’ve upset him, but then he kisses my head again and says, “Alina, I know it’s going to take a long time before you’ll want to do anything sexual with me, and I want you to know that I

would wait a lifetime for you. There's no rush. I'm not going anywhere, but when you're ready, you'll still be my first."

"What?" I lift up and turn to face him.

His dark eyes look so damn sad when he says, "Did you really think I could ever be with someone else? You think I could just forget about you and what you were going through and fuck some random woman? God, baby, you're all I've thought about. Every second of every goddamn day, I've thought of nothing else. No other woman has touched me, and no other woman ever will."

I wrap my arms around his neck and hug him. "I'm so sorry I couldn't wait for you." He starts to cut me off, but I hug him tighter and keep going. "Please just listen. I can't say this while you're looking at me, so I need to say it like this."

He nods his head while I grasp the back of his neck and stare at the headboard in front of me.

"At first I tried to fight him off. I tried so fucking hard, but all it did was make him beat me."

Matvey's body stiffens at the words, but he doesn't interrupt again.

"But after a while, I couldn't take the beatings, so I stopped fighting. I felt like I was betraying you. Every goddamn time he used me, I felt like I was betraying you, and it fucking killed me."

The wet heat of his tears hit my neck, and I hate that I'm making him sad again, but I need to say this.

"You deserve better than this, Matvey. You deserve better than me."

"No," he immediately says, holding me tighter. "Don't even fucking think that, Alina, not for one goddamn second."

"He ruined me," I whisper.

"He didn't."

"I'll never be free of him, and the things he made me do." My voice catches on my words as images assault me, making me wince and close my eyes at all the painful reminders. "I have nothing left to give you. All I wanted was to give you all my firsts, and he fucking took them."

"*Malishka*," he murmurs against my neck, "he didn't take everything. You didn't give him your heart, you didn't give him your love, and you didn't willingly give him your body."

"But I stopped fighting."

“I don’t care if you laid there and begged for it in order to escape a beating. You didn’t want it, and he’s a fucking bastard for forcing himself on you.”

He pulls back and cups my face. His dark eyes are still glassy, and as he studies my face another tear escapes. I’ve never seen him cry before, and it breaks my damn heart to see it now. Running his thumbs over my cheeks, he gently wipes my own tears away.

“I love you, and nothing you could tell me will change that. If you decide you don’t want to be with me, then I’ll stay in your life as your friend and hope like hell you change your mind one day, but I will never be with anyone else, because for me, it’s you or nothing. It’s always only ever been you, Alina.”

“But he’s ruined me.”

“No, baby.”

“He’s made me filthy.”

“Never.” He kisses my forehead, keeping my face cupped in his scarred palms. “You are perfect, so fucking perfect, and nothing will ever change that. When I look at you, I don’t see him. I don’t see what he did to you. I see the woman I love more than life itself, the woman I would happily walk through fire to be with, and the woman I refuse to live without.”

“I don’t deserve you,” I whisper.

“You deserve so much better, but I’m afraid you’re stuck with me because I can’t ever let you go.”

“Good,” I whisper, clutching his wrist, “because I don’t want you to let me go.”

He holds me until his phone buzzes on the nightstand. Reaching over, he grabs it and says, “Roman’s awake and doing well and Emily’s contractions have stopped.”

I let out a relieved sigh. “When can he come home?”

“In a couple of days. Dr. Bianchi wants to watch him for a little bit longer just to make sure he’s okay. Lev and Danil are back, though, and I’m assuming Vitaly and Katya are back from whatever the hell they were doing.” He gives me a soft smile and kisses my cheek. “Will you be okay while I take a quick shower?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

Giving me one more kiss on my cheek, he stands up and grabs some clean clothes. “I’ll be out in just a minute and then we can get some

breakfast.”

He waits for me to nod, studying me to make sure I really am okay. When he’s satisfied that I’ll be fine for a few minutes without him, he steps into the bathroom, shutting the door and immediately turning the shower on. Forcing myself up, I head to the closet so I can get dressed and be ready when he finishes. I’ve just pulled on a pair of yoga pants and one of Matvey’s hoodies when I see the box of presents on one of the shelves.

Curious, I set it down, letting out a soft gasp when I see that my name is written on all of them. My fingers run over the wrapping paper. Some is Christmas themed, some is for birthdays, and there’s even a few that are covered in what has to be Valentine’s Day paper, judging by the hearts all over it in different shades of pink and red. Flipping open one of the small cards that’s taped to the first present, I read what’s written.

Merry Christmas, malishka. There’s never a moment when I’m not thinking of you. I love you and miss you and I’ll never stop looking for you.

The next box is in birthday wrapping paper, and it says, *Happy Birthday, baby. I can’t believe I’m not with you for your nineteenth birthday. I dreamt about you last night, and when I woke up, I had to lose you all over again. I feel like I’m suffocating without you.*

Setting the presents around me, I read every note he’s written, feeling my heart break a little more with each one because as awful as it’s been for me, it’s also been a living hell for him—always wondering, always worrying, and always imagining and fearing the worst.

The next present just has a simple note of *I saw these today and they made me think of you.* Another says, *I just wanted you to have this.*

I’m just about to look at the next one when his large frame fills the doorway. He’s already dressed, but his dark hair is still wet, and he’s every bit as beautiful as I remember him being. I’m about to apologize for snooping when he smiles and squats down next to me.

“I see you found your stash.” He runs the back of one knuckle along my cheek. “They’re yours to open whenever you want.”

I run my hand over the presents, touched that he went through the trouble of picking things out for me even though I wasn’t here to open them. “Thanks, Matvey. I think I want to save them for later if that’s okay.”

He gives me another smile and runs his thumb lightly over my cheek. “Of course. They’re here whenever you want to open them.”

After helping me put them back in the box, he threads his fingers through mine and gives me a small smile. Matvey's never been an easy smiler. He's actually pretty damn stingy with them, but he's always given them so freely to me. It's one of the many things I love about him. I squeeze his hand and let him lead me out of the safety and comfort of his room.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 4

Matvey

Alina's hand feels so small in mine, and I have to resist the urge to pull her into my arms again. I'm trying like hell to not crowd her, but all my instincts are screaming at me to grab her and never let go. I'd watched her sleep last night, and when her mouth had opened in a silent scream as she clutched the blankets, my heart broke yet again for everything she's been through. Her screams of terror may have been silent, but I'd heard every damn one of them. I've suffered from night terrors ever since the fire when I was fifteen, and the fact that she's taught herself to remain silent during them speaks volumes. What the hell did he do to her to make sure she never yelled during a nightmare? What kind of pain do you need to inflict on a person to teach them that?

These are questions I'm going to be getting answers to. I wonder how long it'll take Konstantin to learn the same lesson. Timofey texted me last night to let me know that both Lebedev brothers are chained up and the mansion is secure. I'll be paying him a visit very soon, but I can't bring myself to leave Alina just yet.

"Morning," Danil says when we both walk into the kitchen. He smiles at Alina and gives her a quick hug before wrapping an arm around Simona. "You met my wife, right?"

Alina smiles at the two of them. "I did. I can't believe you're married, Danil."

He laughs and pats Simona's pregnant belly. "And about to be a daddy."

"Do you want some breakfast?" Simona asks.

Alina looks like she's about to say no, so I step in and say, "Yes, she would love a big plate of whatever's left." I look down and wink at her. "I'll

get you some coffee."

While I pour her a mug and add the sugar and milk just like she used to like it, she walks over and looks at the sonogram photos on the fridge.

"There's your nephew," I say, pointing to Roman's son, "and Danil and Simona found out they're having a boy as well, so you've got two nephews coming and whatever Lev and Jolene are having."

"You have to see their nursery," Simona says, waving Alina over. "Katya painted it, and it's gorgeous."

Alina takes her coffee with her as I watch her walk down the hall to the nursery. I don't take my eyes off her, and I keep staring at the empty doorway after she's disappeared inside.

"How's she doing?" Danil asks, walking over to stand by me.

"Better than I expected but also worse in some ways. It's going to take a long time, and I need to find her a therapist. She needs to be able to talk to someone openly, someone that she doesn't also live with."

"I can do some research if you want and get you some names."

I look over at him. "Thanks, brother. That'd be great."

I'm still watching the doorway when Lev and Vitaly walk in. Lev grabs a sausage biscuit and leans against the counter while Vitaly fills a mug.

Lev takes a bite and asks, "How's Alina?"

"She's okay, I guess. Sleeping isn't easy for her."

"That's to be expected," Vitaly says. He hears her voice from the nursery and smiles. "God, it's good to have her back."

I nod and turn to look at him. "I need to see the book."

There's no need to explain it. He knows I'm talking about the sketchpad filled with drawings his wife made. Her childhood was filled with enough trauma to ensure that she also has her fair share of nightmares, and when she has a really bad one, she draws the images to get them out of her head. That's how we found out Alina was Konstantin's pet. Not wanting me to go crazy, they refused to let me see it, but I need to see it now. I need to know what she's been through.

"You sure you want to put yourself through that? Maybe it's better to not know everything."

I look at Vitaly and shake my head. "I need to know."

Convinced I'm not going to budge on this, he sighs and motions for me to follow him. When I look back at Lev and Danil, they both nod as Lev says, "Don't worry. We'll watch over her."

When we're upstairs, Vitaly smacks my arm. "Wait here and I'll grab it. Katya was in the shower, and she might be out now. No one gets to see her bare ass but me."

I lean against the wall outside his door and wait. He knows damn good and well the only bare ass I want to see is Alina's. When he returns a few minutes later, he's holding the sketchpad.

"You sure about this?"

I hold out my hand. "I'm sure."

He gives it to me, but I can tell he doesn't want to. I ignore his hesitancy and ask, "How did Roman look?"

Leaning his shoulder against the wall, he gives me a small smile. "Like absolute shit, but he's alive. Emily didn't look much better when I left, but at least she didn't go into early labor."

"He's really going to be okay, though?"

"Yeah, he'll be fine. It was a clean shot, not anything like the bullet Dominic took, so the doctor is pretty confident there won't be any nerve damage or any complications. I think the only reason he's making him stay there is to watch Emily and keep her on bedrest." He stops and laughs. "Roman's going to have her ass glued to the bed when he gets her home. I'm going to get her one of those long sticks that can reach out and grab things. I think she'll really love that."

I can easily imagine the look on Emily's face when she opens that particular present. "Yeah, she'll be thrilled."

Vitaly laughs. "Just wait until Roman sees what I got him."

The mischievous glint in his eyes is one I've seen many times before. "Do I even want to know?"

"Fuck yeah you do, but Katya and I aren't revealing this gem until the time is right." He laughs again. "It's going to be beautiful."

I scrub a hand over the back of my neck, feeling antsy at being away from Alina. "Thanks for getting this." I hold up the sketchpad and turn to go back downstairs. "Try not to give Roman a heart attack with whatever the hell it is you're planning."

He just laughs before going back into his room. Running downstairs, I drop the sketchpad off, not trusting myself to look at it just yet. When I reach the kitchen, Alina is coming out of the nursery, smiling at something Simona's said. All I can do is stare. It's like a dream seeing her here. I've wished for it so many goddamn times, and now it almost doesn't feel real,

like I’ve just finally cracked and lost my grip on reality. If I have, I hope I never fucking wake up.

She looks over and sees me staring at her. A small smile plays at her lips, and as soon as she’s close enough, I can’t resist closing the distance and pulling her against me again. Her small body molds to mine. Resting my hand on her back, I kiss the top of her head. Even with her wearing my hoodie, I can feel how much weight she’s lost.

“You need to eat, baby.” I keep my arm around her and grab her a plate, filling it with sausage and biscuits and then adding a huge scoop of scrambled eggs.

She eyes the food but makes no move to eat anything.

Leaning closer, I whisper in her ear, “You’ve lost too much weight, *malishka.* Please try and eat.”

She gives a soft nod but still doesn’t take a bite.

“Would you rather eat at the table?”

“No.” Her response is so quick that I worry I’ve said something wrong, but then she gives me another smile and picks up one of the sausage biscuits. “Here’s fine.”

Standing at the island, she takes a small bite while I fix a plate for myself. Jolene comes down, grabbing a biscuit and sitting at the island by Lev. We’re filling Alina in on how everyone met when Vitaly and Katya walk in. As soon as Alina sees Katya, she puts the biscuit she’s been slowly nibbling on down. Katya looks away, unable to meet Alina’s eyes while Vitaly keeps his arm wrapped around his wife, holding her close.

Katya starts crying, although she’s trying like hell to hide it, and as soon as Vitaly feels her body shake, he pulls her into a hug and whispers something in her ear. Alina quickly shakes her head and says, “Please don’t cry, Katya. I don’t blame you for any of this.”

I’m not at all surprised that after everything Alina’s been through, her first thought is to try and comfort Katya. She walks over, and since she’s still clutching my hand, I go with her.

“They’re my brothers,” Katya says, “and I’m so sorry for what they did to you.”

Alina lets go of my hand so she can pull Katya into a hug. “It’s not your fault,” Alina tells her. “There was nothing you could’ve done to stop them.”

Katya nods her head and gives Alina another squeeze before pulling back and wiping her eyes. She looks at me and Alina, her cheeks heating up

in a blush. “I’m so sorry. This isn’t about me. I don’t mean to make it seem like it is.”

Vitaly wraps an arm around her upper chest and pulls her against him. “No one thinks that, *ptichka*.”

“We haven’t gotten a chance to get to know one another,” Alina says, looking around to include Jolene and Simona, “but I’m looking forward to meeting all of you. These guys were all single when I last saw them, and now they’re smitten. That’s no easy feat.” She turns back to Vitaly and points a finger at him. “Especially you. I was afraid you’d never settle down. I’m happy you’ve proven me wrong.”

“I just hadn’t met the right woman,” Vitaly says. “Konstantin wanted to join our families, so technically I had no choice but to say yes because we needed the connection to find you, but she was so beautiful and so stubborn. I couldn’t resist falling for her. Now I’m completely whipped and loving it.”

“I wasn’t that stubborn,” Katya says, making Vitaly laugh.

“Don’t let her fool you. She was a massive handful. Still is. It’s a full-time job keeping her in line.”

“Keeping *me* in line?” Katya laughs, rolling her eyes at him.

Vitaly looks over at us. “Poor thing’s confused. It’s those pregnancy hormones. It muddles her thinking.”

Alina laughs, but I notice the way her smile doesn’t fully reach her eyes, and when she starts to scratch at her tattoo again, I gently grab her hand, cupping it in mine as I lead her back to the island.

“Please try and eat some more,” I whisper near her ear.

She nods and grabs the biscuit again, but instead of taking a bite, she looks up at all of us. “I want to know what the plan is.”

“Baby, you don’t need to worry about any of that,” I start to say, but she cuts me off.

“I have to know, and I want to know.”

All I want to do is wrap her up in a tight hug and keep her safe from every damn thing, but that’s not what she needs, and I know that. She’s already been exposed to the worst kinds of evil in this world, and I don’t have the right to try and shelter her from it now. She’s earned the fucking right to be involved in this in every damn way.

“Okay.” I kiss her forehead and tell her the truth. “No one knows we’ve wiped out the Lebedev Bratva. Danil’s been working with Casimir, the hacker on Konstantin’s payroll.”

Danil gives Alina a grin. “We convinced him last night that it was in his best interest to switch his loyalty to our Bratva. Between the two of us, we’ve managed to create the illusion that Konstantin and Osip are still running business as usual.”

“Why are you working so hard to make it seem like they’re still running things?” Alina looks at me and my brothers, trying to piece it all together. “Are you worried about retaliation?”

With her hand still in mine, I run my thumb over her skin. “No, we aren’t worried about that. As much as I’d like to say that our main goal in life is to take down sex traffickers, it’s just not true. We only went after them because we wanted to find you. When everyone realizes that the Lebedev Bratva is gone, they’re not going to retaliate. Someone else will just move in and take over the void their absence will create. We won’t ever allow that shit in our city, though.”

“If someone new will just take over and you aren’t worried about someone getting revenge, then why aren’t you letting the news leak out?”

“There’s an auction that’s planned for next month,” I tell her.

Danil cuts in and says, “The same kind of auction that I went to when I found Simona, except this one is getting even more attention. There’s going to be a lot of prominent men there, men in very high positions in governments from all over the world.”

Lev smiles and gives a soft laugh. “It’d be a real shame to miss killing all those bastards.”

“It really would,” Vitaly agrees. “They’ll all be together right here in our city, expecting to buy trafficked women, and we’re going to give them one hell of a surprise.”

“And the truly beautiful part is that we’ll be able to visit them one by one and shoot them in their private viewing booths,” Danil says. “We can have our men running the place, and these jackasses will just willingly walk into our trap.”

“And then we torch the place,” I tell her, watching her reaction.

Her blue-green eyes search my face, trying just as hard to read me. “And then you’re done with this shit?”

“Yes, and then we’re done with it.” I give her hand another squeeze. “After this, we focus on our area of the city. Maybe we’ll expand into the north and south. We’d also like to continue working with Dominic.”

“His dad will love that,” Vitaly says with a laugh. He looks at Alina. “Antonio did not warm up to us.”

“You found someone who’s immune to your charm?” She manages to keep a straight face when she adds, “I don’t believe it.”

“I know, right? I thought maybe he’d come around, but every time I see him, he just looks grumpier.”

“Well, maybe I’ll meet him when I visit Roman.”

I look down at her. “You want to go to Dominic’s house?” My heart speeds up at the thought of her leaving the safety of the penthouse, but if she picks up on my nerves, she hides it well.

“Yeah, I want to go today. I need to see for myself that Roman’s okay.”

I scratch at the stubble on my jaw. “What about a video call?”

She lifts a brow at me. “I’ll go get ready.”

I know Alina well enough to know arguing with her about this is pointless, so I just kiss her head and say, “I’ll let Dominic know we’re on our way.”

It’s only after she walks off that I realize she’s barely eaten anything on her plate. She’d picked at it mostly, managing to eat half of one biscuit, but the sausage and eggs are untouched.

“Well, that’s not going to cut it,” I mutter, pushing the plate aside.

“She’s still getting used to everything,” Lev says, trying to make me feel better.

I look over at him. “You saw how thin she is. She needs to eat more.”

“It’s one of the many ways Konstantin likes to exert his power.” Katya’s speaking low, but I hear every damn word. “Even the women he employs at the house are only allowed to eat what he gives them.”

“What does he give them to eat?” I ask her.

“From what I could see, it’s mainly very bland things. Oatmeal, toast, sandwiches, that sort of thing, and never anything that would actually fill someone up. The portions were very small. He liked to control every aspect of their lives.”

She stops talking when she hears Alina coming back up the stairs. I walk around to meet her, whispering a quick thanks to Katya on my way. She’s still wearing my hoodie, but she’s switched the yoga pants for jeans and put on a pair of sneakers. Even without makeup, she’s effortlessly the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.

“Ready?” I ask her.

She nods and says a quick goodbye to everyone while I send a text to Dominic, letting him know we'll be there soon. His response comes a few seconds later.

I'll let my men at the gate know.

"I can't believe he saved my life last night," Lev groans. "He's never going to let me live that down, and it makes me feel slightly guilty about shooting him."

Jolene hugs him tighter while I give a soft laugh. "Yeah, he's never going to let you forget it. It'll be interesting to see how he calls that favor in. You'll probably have to agree to let your firstborn join his mafia."

"Like hell," he growls. "The next generation of Melnikovs are taking over this Bratva so we can fucking retire."

"Sounds good to me," Danil says while Jolene and Simona look less than thrilled. Katya doesn't seem surprised. She grew up in this life, so she knows what's expected of the children.

Simona pats her stomach. "Well, we have lots of time to discuss future plans."

"Yeah," Jolene agrees. "No need to make them Bratva members just yet."

Lev smiles and kisses her forehead. "*Malinkaya*, I hate to say it, but they became members of the Melnikov Bratva the second they were conceived."

The look she gives him clearly says, *we'll be talking about this later*.

Grabbing Alina's hand, I pull her into the elevator, leaving my brothers to dig their way out of the mess they've gotten themselves into.

"That should be a fun conversation," Alina says, watching me push the button for the parking garage.

"Katya understands. Maybe she'll help smooth things over."

"I don't think there's any smoothing over the fact that their sons will one day be running a Bratva and constantly be putting their lives in danger."

"Their husbands do it," I remind her with a grin.

"Not at all the same thing."

"True enough, I suppose." When the doors open, I lead her to my black Camaro, refusing to think about any future kids that Alina and I may or may not have. I always imagined that one day we'd have a family, but now I'm not even sure if that's something she'll want.

I open the door for her, helping her in before walking to the driver's side. She looks over at me, voicing what I'm worrying about.

"Would you be okay with our kids taking over?"

Unable to hide my smile, she sees it and her face falls. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that."

"Hey." Cupping her face, I turn her towards me. "Why do you look so sad? You know I'm not expecting anything, right? I'd love to have a family with you one day, Alina, but there's no rush. You're only twenty, *malishka*. We have plenty of time."

"I always wanted kids with you, Matvey," she admits. "I wasn't in any rush to get pregnant or anything, but I always imagined a little boy with eyes as dark as yours and a little girl who'd look at you like you were her hero." She gives a soft smile. "Maybe he'd be quiet like you and she'd love to read books like me."

"We can still have them, Alina. Whenever you're ready."

"What if I'm never ready?" Her question is a soft whisper in the car, and I hate how scared and unsure she seems. "What if he's ruined that for me, too?"

I kiss her forehead. "He hasn't ruined anything, but if you decide you don't want kids, then we won't have them. You and I will grow old together, and we'll surround ourselves with our nieces and nephews, and I will be so fucking happy just to have you."

"I don't want you to feel like you're stuck with me," she starts to say, but I quickly cut her off.

"Don't, *malishka*, just don't. I know this is hard for you, and I know it's going to take a long time for you to get him out of your head, and I will be with you every step of the way and do everything I can to help you, but there's one thing I can't tolerate and that's you doubting how I feel about you."

"I don't doubt how you feel about me. I just feel like a selfish ass, like I'm keeping you from a happy future with a normal woman who can give you what you need."

I caress her cheek with my thumb. "And what do I need, *malishka*?"

She avoids my eyes when she says, "Sex and happiness and kids." After a second she adds, "Someone who can sleep through the damn night. Hell, someone who can kiss you goodnight and then sleep through the night without waking up from a nightmare."

When I’m sure she’s finished, I kiss her forehead again. “See? I can kiss you goodnight, and I don’t mind holding you when you wake up scared, and you make me so goddamn happy. We already talked about kids, and as far as sex goes, I wish you wouldn’t worry about it.”

“It’s not fair to you.”

“Let me worry about that. If I could survive you grinding against me without losing my mind, I can survive anything.”

She gives me a faint smile. “Will you promise me something?”

“Anything.”

“Promise me you’ll let me go if it becomes too much. I swear I won’t make you feel bad. I love you too much to do that. I just don’t want you staying with me out of guilt or a sense of duty. I would hate that.”

I think about what she’s said, knowing there’s no way in hell it’ll ever happen. With a sigh, I search her eyes, memorizing every detail of the pretty blue-green color. “One day you’ll understand how much I love you.”

“You’re not going to promise me?”

“I promise you, Alina. I promise you it’ll never fucking happen.”

Before she can argue, I kiss her nose and sit back in my seat, starting the car and waiting for her to put her seatbelt on before driving us out of the parking garage. She stares out the window the whole way, taking in the city as it passes by.

“Let me know if there’s anything you want to do or anywhere you want to go.”

“It’s so different from Moscow.” She’s quiet for a few minutes, and then she says, “He took me to St. Petersburg first, and then we went to Berlin. He took me with him to a few different cities, but we mainly stayed in Berlin. I wasn’t allowed to leave, though, or go outside.”

I swallow the rage that threatens to take control at the thought of her being locked up and tormented day after day. Reaching over, I squeeze her thigh. “We can do anything you want, *malishka*.”

She rests her hand on top of mine and nods. Her fingers fidget against my skin before she caresses my scarred palm. Alina’s never shied away from my scars. The first time I took my shirt off in front of her, she’d kissed a path along my back, whispering how beautiful she thought I was. I can still remember the feel of her breath on my skin. I’ve never felt self-conscious in front of her. She’s the only person who can make me forget about the fire and the pain and the sound of my sister’s screams.

After a few minutes, she asks, “He’s still alive, right?”

“He is, and he’ll remain that way until I think he’s had enough.”

“When will that be?”

I glance over at her. “I haven’t even started yet. Right now he’s strung up and waiting. He can fucking stay that way. He’s being given just enough water and food to keep him alive.”

“What happened to all the women?”

“I heard this morning that several of them have already been in contact with their families and a flight is leaving this evening for Europe. The women at the mansion are also being taken care of, and Oksana took the offer of rehab and money. She didn’t want to go back to her family, and since they’re the ones who gave her to Konstantin in the first place, I can’t say I blame her.”

“I always felt bad for her. If I’d had access to drugs or alcohol, I would’ve been using it as an escape, too. As bad as it was for me, I kept telling myself that you all were looking for me. I at least had that hope. I would’ve never survived if I’d been willingly given to him by my own family.”

The very idea has me squeezing her hand tighter. She grabs me back, but she doesn’t stop talking.

“You can leave me alone if you need to take care of things. I hope you know that.”

“The only thing I need to take care of right now is you, *malishka*. Everything else can wait.”

When I look over, she gives me a small smile. She keeps running her fingers along my palm until we pull up to the Alessi mansion and I need my hand to shift gears. The men at the front, give us a nod as the large, iron gate swings open.

“Damn,” Alina whispers, taking in the huge house and sprawling yard. I don’t mention that my brothers and I threw severed heads onto the nice, green grass just a few months ago when we were pretending to be at war with the Italians, but the memory does bring a smirk to my lips. That might be part of the reason why Antonio hasn’t warmed up to us. He wants expensive suits and tattoos that are hidden and the violence behind closed doors, but that’s not how our Bratva works. With the exception of Roman, who’s had to hide his tattoos beneath his suits so he could get in close with politicians, we’re covered in them. Neck tats, jeans and hoodies, and an

eagerness to get our hands bloody has made it hard for Antonio to welcome us with open arms. Dominic's warming up to us, though. It wouldn't surprise me at all if he gets a neck tat one day.

I park next to a red Lamborghini and turn to look at Alina. "Ready to see your brother?"

"Yeah, more than ready."

Getting out, I walk around to open her door and then take her hand in mine. I don't see any guards, but I know we're being watched, so I'm not at all surprised when the front door opens without us even needing to knock. The older, dark-haired woman smiles and motions for us to come in.

"May I take your coats?"

Her Italian accent is thick, but she's easy to understand. We hand her our coats and then follow as she leads us further into the house. Unlike Konstantin's mansion, the Alessi home is gorgeous. The dark wood floors are covered in rugs that are a deep shade of red and so thick I feel like my boots are sinking into them. The walls are a light color, and paintings that I'm fairly confident Katya would be drooling over fill the empty spaces. Even though it's obvious the Alessi family has some serious wealth, the place feels homey, like it isn't all for show or to lord over people.

We follow the woman down a hallway, and when she stops in front of a set of double doors that are the same color as the floors, she gives a soft knock before saying something in Italian. I recognize Dominic's voice when he responds, and he must be telling her to let us in because she gives us both a smile and opens the door, waving us in.

"Would you like me to get you anything to drink?"

"No thanks," I tell her and then look to Alina, but she shakes her head and gives the woman a smile.

She shuts the door on her way out, leaving us alone with Dominic. Standing up from behind his desk, he walks over to greet us. He's in his usual expensive suit with what has to be handmade leather shoes, impeccable as always, but I see the tired look in his eyes. I recognize it well. He's running on hate and his need for revenge—the same thing that sustained me for the last two years.

We shake hands before he turns to Alina. "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay. I'd like to see Roman."

"Of course. My doctor said he's doing much better, and Emily is resting and seems out of danger of early labor."

Alina grips my hand, but the tension leaves her face at the news. “Thank you for bringing them here and letting them stay.”

“They can stay as long as they need.” His dark eyes meet mine. “I’d like to stay on good terms with the Melnikovs. It’s more beneficial to all of us to get along, so my house is yours for as long as you need it.”

“We appreciate it,” I tell him.

With a nod, he grabs a phone and sends a quick text. “Okay, let me show you where he’s at. We did have him in the operating room, but he’s in a guest bedroom now with Emily. I thought he’d be more comfortable there, and he was pretty damn adamant that she be right next to him.”

“I imagine so,” I say, knowing “pretty damn adamant” is probably putting it pretty damn nicely.

Wrapping my arm around Alina, we follow Dominic out of his office and up the wide staircase. Her steps pick up when we reach the hallway, too excited to slow down. She looks up at me, giving me a soft smile and reminding me yet again that she’s the only thing I need in this life, because as long as I have her, I have everything.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 5

Alina

Matvey's giving me one of his sweet smiles again, and when I start walking faster, excited to see Roman, he gives a soft laugh, lengthening his stride and matching my eager footsteps. Dominic knocks on a door at the end of the hall, and when I hear my brother's voice, I quickly duck under his arm and bust into the room.

I run to the bed, eyeing Roman's bandaged chest and the pale tint to his skin. Emily's lying next to him, snuggled up to the side of him that didn't take a bullet. He has one arm wrapped around her and his hand is resting on her stomach like he's willing his son to stay in there just a little bit longer.

"Roman," I whisper before leaning down and hugging him as carefully as I can. "Don't ever scare me like that again." I swore to myself I wasn't going to cry, but feeling my brother hug me back as he whispers in Russian how much he's missed me has me crying like a damn baby.

When I pull back, he smiles up at me. "You've gotten older, and you're way too thin." He looks over at Matvey, who's standing and waiting right behind me. "You need to make her eat."

"Believe me, I'm trying. She listens to me as well as she used to." He gives me a wink to let me know he's joking and then looks over at Emily and switches to English. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm doing a lot better now that I know Roman's going to be okay." She looks at my brother, and the love I see in her eyes is mirrored in his when he squeezes her hand and then brings it to his mouth so he can kiss the back of it.

"I'm sorry I scared you, *solnishka*."

“Just don’t ever do it again, or at least not until after I give birth. I don’t think I can put off labor a second time.”

Roman looks terrified at the idea of his son coming too early, but before he can worry too much about it, a man’s accented voice comes from behind us.

“I would agree with that. Another stressful event will most likely push you into labor.”

We all turn to the man standing in the doorway by Dominic. I recognize him from last night, and when he gives me a smile, I easily return it. There’s something I like about him, and it’s not just because he saved my brother’s life. Even though he works for the Alessi family and is obviously involved in crime, there’s something comforting about him. Maybe it’s the deep smile and laugh lines that are clearly etched into his face, or the easy relationship he seems to have with Dominic, or maybe it’s his calm nature that immediately puts me at ease. Whatever it is, it’s working, and I swear my blood pressure goes down a few numbers just by being in the same room as him.

He turns to me and smiles, holding a hand out for me to shake. “You must be Alina. I’m Dr. Bianchi.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” I shake his hand and return his smile. “Thank you for saving my brother’s life and for taking care of Emily.”

He waves off my thanks as if it’s nothing. “It was an easy wound, and Emily calmed down quickly once she realized he’d be okay.”

While Dominic starts talking to Matvey, Dr. Bianchi steps closer. When he speaks, it’s in a low voice that’s meant only for me. “Mr. Alessi told me a little about what you’ve been through. I’d like to examine you, if you’re okay with that, just to make sure everything’s okay.”

My first reaction is to stiffen and look down. I’m just about to shake my head and tell him no when he says, “It’s important you get checked, Alina.”

I know he’s right, and I know it’s the responsible thing to do, but that doesn’t mean I have any desire to do it. Matvey’s been keeping an eye on me, and I’m not at all surprised when he walks closer and wraps a protective arm around me.

“Everything okay?”

I pat his hand and nod. “Yeah, Dr. Bianchi wants to examine me.”

“Baby, you don’t have to do that right now,” Matvey quickly says. “We can go somewhere else, or we can find you a female doctor if that makes

you more comfortable.”

I think about what he’s said. A doctor’s office or hospital isn’t an option because of the questions it would bring up. Plus, the cold, sterile environment has me inwardly cringing. At least if I do it here, it’ll be private, and even though I’m not thrilled at the idea of Dr. Bianchi seeing me, I trust him, and that’s not something I take lightly.

“No, it’s okay,” I tell Matvey. “I’d rather do it here and get it over with.”

“Do you want me to come with you?”

I look up at Matvey, wanting to keep him with me, but then I think about the things I’ll be asked, and I refuse to put him through that, so I smile and say, “No, I’ll be okay.” When he hesitates, I squeeze his hand. “I promise I’ll be fine.”

He looks like he wants to argue, but he bites back whatever he was going to say and instead pulls me in for a hug, bringing his mouth to my ear. “I’ll be right outside the room, *malishka*. Holler for me if you need me and I’ll be there.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“What are you doing, *solnishka*?”

I look over at the sound of my brother’s voice. He’s watching his wife scoot off the bed and come walking towards me. She gives me a smile and stands beside me before looking at Dr. Bianchi.

“We’re ready when you are,” she tells him.

“Baby,” Roman starts to say, but she cuts him off by grabbing my hand and saying, “She’s my sister-in-law, and there’s no way in hell I’m letting her go through this alone.”

I squeeze her hand, giving her a grateful smile, because as brave as I’m trying to be, the truth is my heart is racing and I’m feeling lightheaded at the thought of being alone with a man while I’m naked and spreading my legs.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“You don’t need to thank me, and don’t let the men fool you.” She pats her stomach and smiles up at me again. “I’m tougher than they think, and this will not send me into early labor. Your nephew’s not coming just yet.”

“We can do this in the bedroom across the hall,” Dr. Bianchi says, confirming that my instincts were right about him. He knows how difficult this is going to be for me, and he’s not making me do the exam on a table with my feet in stirrups.

Matvey kisses my head. “Don’t forget, baby, call if you need me.”

I give him a hug, promising that I will, and then I follow Dr. Bianchi across the hall with Emily right behind me. Matvey closes the door for us, and I know he’ll be standing right outside it the whole time. I eye the medical bag that’s already sitting on the mattress. Dr. Bianchi gives a small shrug and smiles.

“I hoped you’d agree to this, and I wanted to be prepared in case you said yes.”

Emily helps me on the bed while the doctor starts getting what he needs.

“I want to be here for you, but seriously if my being here is going to make you uncomfortable, please let me know.”

I grab her hand, noticing that she has my brother’s name tattooed on her inner wrist. “No, please stay. I don’t want to be alone.” I hate appearing weak, and I hate having to lean on her for support when we’ve just met, but I need her here with me.

“I’m not going anywhere.” She smiles and pats my hand before grabbing a blanket to drape over my lower body as I shimmy out of my jeans and panties. Seeing how nervous I am, she starts talking to me while she sits on the edge of the bed near my head. “So tell me every embarrassing story you have of Roman.”

I smile and let out a soft laugh. “The truth is he’s always been a pretty amazing big brother. He basically raised me. Well, they all did. They were ridiculously overprotective.”

She laughs. “Yeah, I can imagine that easily enough. You know the first night we met he called a locksmith and had my locks changed while I was sleeping. Then he kept one of the keys for himself and assigned two men to secretly watch over me.”

“God, he fell hard for you. Girls were always after my brother, but he never looked twice at any of them, and he definitely wouldn’t have cared what kind of locks they had on their doors.”

“I fell just as hard for him,” she admits. “I was pretty much a goner from the very beginning.”

“I’m really glad he found you.”

Before we can get all emotional, Dr. Bianchi walks over and gives my knee a squeeze. “I know this is unpleasant, and I’ll be as quick as I can. I’m going to do some routine tests on you, and I’d also like you to take a pregnancy test.”

“I’m not pregnant. He made me get a shot every three months, and you can test me for whatever you want, but Konstantin had a preference for virgins. He wouldn’t sleep with a woman if she’d already been with someone else.” Turning to Emily, I say, “Please don’t tell Matvey that. He already has so many regrets and guilt and even if we had slept together before I was kidnapped, I would’ve been taken to a brothel or sold to someone else. It wouldn’t have changed the hell I was living in; it just would’ve been a different devil in charge.”

“I won’t say a word, Alina. This is your business to tell, not mine.”

I know my brother isn’t a dumbass, but men can be blinded by women, and I’m so fucking grateful Roman found someone who’s not only beautiful but also genuinely kind. She keeps my hand in hers while Dr. Bianchi examines me. As degrading as Konstantin had been, he never did manage to wipe away my ability to be embarrassed. I never got used to the forced nudity or the humiliation, and now is no different. My face heats up, and when I wince, he murmurs something in Italian, the sound of it soothing, even though I have no idea what he’s said.

“There’s some tearing, but nothing that won’t heal on its own.” His fingers are gentle when they travel lower and my face heats up even more. “He sodomized you, yes?”

“Yes,” I whisper as Emily squeezes my hand tighter.

He continues his exam, being as careful as he can be as he swabs me for the tests, and when he pulls the blanket back down, I let out an audible sigh, glad to have it over with.

“He beat you, too?”

“He did.”

“Do you have any pain anywhere? Did he ever break anything?”

“It’s been a while since he beat me, and nothing was ever broken. A few cracked ribs, though.” I pull my panties back on and sit up. “I haven’t had a period in months. I’m a little worried about that.” My fear is that he’s damaged me permanently in some way. I know I’m not ready for sex or kids, but I don’t want the option taken from me. I want to know that I can have a normal life if and when I decide I’m ready for it.

Dr. Bianchi sees right through to my fears and removes his gloves before giving my knee another soft pat. “It’s not uncommon for the shot he gave you to cause your periods to stop, but so can stress. You’re also underweight, which can have an effect on menstruation as well. My guess is

you'll get it back when you've had some time to heal. When was your last shot?"

"A month ago, I think."

"Do you want to keep getting it?"

"No."

"It takes some women a year to get their periods back, so it's nothing you need to worry about. Just focus on healing, Alina, inside and out. You need to talk to someone about what you've been through."

"I'm going to. Matvey's going to help me find someone."

"Good. You can't go through this alone, and you can't expect everything to return back to normal just because you're no longer being held by this man." He looks at Emily and then motions towards the shut door. "I'm glad you have the support of your family, but often that's not enough. A professional will be able to help you in ways that they can't."

"I know. I'm going to speak to someone," I assure him.

Before he lets me go, he feels my ribs and listens to my lungs and heart, making sure everything seems fine since I mentioned the cracked ribs. When he's satisfied they've healed properly, he starts to gather everything together while I slip my jeans back on and stand up. Emily waits for me, silently supporting me like she has been throughout the entire exam. I slip my sneakers on and am about to leave when Dr. Bianchi surprises me by saying, "Working for the Alessi family has never bothered me, and it's moments like this that remind me I made the right choice with them. The man who hurt you needs to suffer for what he's done." He points a finger at the door. "And those men out there will make damn sure he does. A prison cell is too good for a bastard like Konstantin." He zips up his bag and gives my shoulder a soft pat when he walks by. "Isabella was such a sweet girl, and she didn't deserve what happened to her, and neither did you, Alina."

"Thank you, Dr. Bianchi, for everything."

He slips me a card with his number written on the back. "Call me if you ever need anything."

When he opens the door, the first thing I see is Matvey leaning against the opposite wall. His broad shoulders fill the space, and when he lifts his head, his dark eyes immediately find mine. I see the tension leave him when he sees that I'm okay. He looks me over, convincing himself that I'm fine before he closes the distance, pulling me back into his arms as he kisses my head.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” I squeeze him back, taking the comfort he so freely gives.

“I’ll be in touch about the results,” Dr. Bianchi says before walking away with Dominic.

We go back into the room with Roman and visit with him for a while until it’s obvious he’s trying like hell to stay awake.

“I’ll be home soon,” he promises when I lean down and give him another hug. “I love you, sis.”

“I love you, too,” I tell him, kissing his cheek. “Get some rest, and we’ll see you soon.”

Matvey pats his leg while I hug Emily goodbye and thank her again for staying with me. By the time we leave the room, she’s already cuddled back up against Roman, and I know they’ll both be asleep in minutes. She may not be on painkillers like he is, but the pregnancy and worrying about him has taken its toll.

Taking Matvey’s hand, I hold it as we walk back downstairs. Dominic hears us and comes walking over.

“You’re welcome to stay for lunch.”

Matvey looks down at me, willing to do whatever I want. “Thanks, but I think I’d rather just go back.”

“Of course,” Dominic says, giving me a smile. “You’re welcome here anytime.” He turns his attention to Matvey. “I’ll let you know if I hear anything new, but Roman should be able to leave tomorrow. I’ll have a car bring him home.”

“Thanks, Dominic.” Matvey reaches out to shake his hand. “We owe you yet again.”

“You don’t owe me shit. Just get me the name I want and we’re even.”

“You’ll have it,” Matvey assures him. “Danil never fails.”

He’s right. Danil is like a fucking bloodhound. Once he catches a scent, he won’t stop until he finds exactly where it leads.

Looking up at Dominic, I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing when I ask, “Do you have a picture of your sister I can see?”

His dark eyes study me for a second before he reaches into his suit jacket and pulls out his phone. Without a word, he pulls up a photo and holds it out to me. I stare at the woman with the long, dark hair and the huge grin on her face, unsure if what I’m about to say is going to hurt or

help Dominic, but I can't lie to him. He deserves more than that after everything he's done for us.

"I saw her."

"What?" He tenses at the news, every part of him on high alert as he looks down at me. "Where? When?"

Matvey's arm tightens around me at Dominic's tone, but I know he's not angry at me, and I know I'm not in any danger. I recognize the fury inside him because I'm consumed with it myself. We all are. People were taken from us, lives were stolen, and in Dominic's case, there's no getting his sister back. The only happy ending he's getting is when he sinks his blade into the fucker who killed her.

"It wasn't too long after I was taken. This was when I still thought it was worth it to fight Konstantin. I hadn't learned that it was pointless yet. He brought me to an auction as a warning. He wanted me to see where I'd end up if I kept being willful."

Matvey's thumb caresses my shoulder, reminding me that he's still here with me, and just that one small touch is enough to make me feel better. I take a deep breath and tell Dominic the rest.

"This was in Berlin. I have no idea where the building was. He made me wear a blindfold on the way there."

"What about on the way back?"

The vivid memory of what Konstantin had done to me in that building after he'd made me witness those poor women being sold is enough to send a shiver down my spine. Matvey feels it and kisses my head, pulling me closer against him. I look away from Dominic when I answer this time.

"I wasn't in any condition to notice anything on the drive back. I'm sorry."

Dominic scrubs a hand over his jaw. "No, I'm sorry. Is there anything you can tell me about her? Did you speak to her?"

I shake my head. "I wasn't allowed to talk to any of them. They were all lined up, all dressed the same, and then they were auctioned off one at a time."

"Do you remember anything specific about her?"

The pain in his voice breaks another damn piece of my heart. I feel like I'm down to nothing, like the last of it's going to shatter soon, but it keeps beating when I say, "I remember her because at one point Konstantin got so angry at me that he backhanded me, and when I fell to the floor, I looked

over and saw her. I remember her eyes so clearly. They were a beautiful brown, and even though she didn't know me, they were filled with so much love. It was just one stranger looking at another, but we connected, both of us understanding the hell and misery of the other, and in that moment, she gave me comfort. Everyone else had turned away from me, terrified that by looking at me it would make them a target for Konstantin, but your sister didn't care. She met my eyes anyway, and I'll always be grateful for that. I wish I could've thanked her."

Dominic nods, but his mouth is in a tight line and his jaw is so tense I can see the veins in his neck. He rubs a hand through his light beard, taking in a breath before he meets my eyes again.

"Thank you for telling me. That sounds like Isabella. She had a good heart, way too sweet for this family." The corner of his mouth lifts up in a small smile, but the sadness in his eyes doesn't go away. "Do you remember anything else?"

"Nothing useful," I tell him. "The women were led out of the room, and Konstantin brought me into a viewing box. I saw them get auctioned off, but I have no idea who the buyers were."

"How much was she sold for?"

"Three-hundred thousand." I'll never forget the way she'd looked standing on stage, eyes wide and terrified while anonymous men called out bids for her. I spare Dominic and Matvey the details of how she'd been made to turn around in her see-through dress so they could all see exactly what they were buying or the way Konstantin had pointed at her while he yanked on my hair, forcing me to watch the auction. He'd told me that virgins sell for more, and that if I kept disobeying him, he'd beat me to within an inch of my life so that only the roughest brothels would bid on me.

"You won't get sold to some Swede for three-hundred thousand, pet. I'll make sure the price doesn't go above five thousand. Can you imagine the kind of place you'll end up in?"

"He was Swedish," I say, forcing the memory out of my mind. "The man who bought her was Swedish. I remember Konstantin saying that."

"Fuck," Dominic says with a deep sigh. He scrubs a hand through what was just moments before perfectly styled hair, and I have a feeling this is as out of control as I'll ever see the man. "Thank you, Alina." Lifting his phone back up, he swipes through it before tapping the screen and bringing

it to his ear. “I’m sorry, but I need to let Danil know. Lucia can show you out.”

He’s already rushing back to his office when Lucia, the woman who first let us in, appears from the hall. She smiles at us, already holding our coats like she’s been ready and waiting.

“Please follow me.” She gives us both a big smile, swiping back a few strands of graying hair as Matvey helps me into my coat. “Mr. Alessi said you are welcome here anytime. The men at the gate have already been informed.”

“Thank you,” Matvey and I tell her as she leads us to the front door. With one more smile, she retreats back into the house, making me wonder how she first came to work for the Alessi family. She didn’t seem terrified like the women who worked for Konstantin and Osip always had. The way she’d looked at Dominic and been more motherly than anything else, and seeing it had raised my estimation of the man. Men can lie about who they really are all they want, but their staff won’t ever be able to hide their hatred. Fake smiles stand out, and Lucia’s were genuine when she looked at her boss.

When we’re back at the penthouse, we fill everyone in on how Roman and Emily looked, and when we’re alone again, Matvey heats me up a can of soup. He’s insisting I eat, and soup is the only thing I think I might be able to stomach. Putting the bowl in front of me, he hands me a spoon and gets me a glass of water.

“Please eat, *malishka*.”

I take a bite while he leans against the island, watching me. When I set the spoon aside after a few bites, his eyes soften with worry.

“Baby, it’s not enough.”

“I know. It’s just hard.”

“Can you tell me why eating is so difficult?”

“It just brings up a lot of stuff. I wasn’t given much to eat, and when I was allowed food,” I pause for a second, trying to figure out a way to explain what it had felt like to be treated like an abused dog, but when I can’t think of anything, I just settle on, “it was unpleasant,” which might be the understatement of the goddamn year.

He leans closer, cupping my face and kissing my forehead. “I’m going to spend the rest of my life helping you replace those memories with better ones, but you’re going to need to eat more for that to happen.”

Taking the spoon, he fills it with the chicken soup and holds it near my lips. “Please, *malishka*.”

I open my mouth, earning me a smile when I swallow the soup. He quickly fills the spoon again, afraid I’m going to stop eating if he waits too long in between bites, but I don’t. I open my mouth for him every time, surprised at what a difference it makes to have him feed me. He’s put my focus on something else, and he’s changed the situation enough so that it doesn’t immediately make me think of Konstantin. After all, I was never spoon-fed by the bastard. When my mind starts to drift, Matvey murmurs a soft “ah-ah,” gently directing me back to the here and now.

“It’s just you and me, *malishka*. No one but us.”

I put my focus back on him and take the spoonful he offers. When I’ve eaten almost all of it, and I know I can’t take any more, I pull back and shake my head. He looks down at the remnants and sighs.

“You sure you can’t finish it?”

“I’m sure. I need to take it slow. I’m used to very small meals.”

He nods, and I can tell he’s storing up every single tidbit of information I give him, using it to feed his rage and holding onto it for when he can use it against Konstantin and Osip.

“You did good, baby. Thanks for eating so much for me.”

Putting the dirty dishes in the sink, he looks up and catches me yawning. The interrupted sleep mixed with my full stomach and everything that’s happened is catching up to me, and I can barely keep my eyes open. Giving me a smile, he walks over and picks me up, cradling me against his chest like I weigh nothing.

“You don’t have to carry me, Matvey.”

“You have no idea how badly I want to.”

I smile against his shoulder and wrap my arms tighter around his neck. The rocking lull of his movements has me almost asleep by the time he carries me to his bed. Tucking me in, he rests beside me, stroking my hair as my eyes drift shut. The last thing I remember is his lips on my cheek, kissing me softly before whispering that he loves me.

The room is darker when I wake, and the first thing I notice is that I’m the only one in the bed. I jerk upright, my heart in my throat, looking around for Matvey.

“Alina, it’s okay.”

I turn to see Lev sitting in the rocking chair that's in the corner of the room. He gets up, walking over to me so he can sit on the edge of the bed.

"You're safe."

"Where's Matvey?"

He lifts a pierced brow at me, and I know what he's going to say before the words are even out of his mouth. "He waited as long as he could."

I let out a heavy sigh, trying not to be hurt that he left without telling me. I knew he'd go to the mansion at some point. It has to be taken care of, but I thought maybe he'd wait a few days or at least not leave while I was sleeping.

"Don't be mad at him," Lev says, nudging my shoulder with his. "He has two years of rage living inside him, and it has to come out or it's going to destroy him."

There's still enough light in the room for me to make out the blue of his eyes when he says, "These last two years nearly killed him, Alina."

"I know," I whisper. "I'm not mad at him."

"He asked me to sit in here with you in case you had another nightmare." He looks down and checks the black, complicated-looking watch on his wrist. "He's been gone a few hours, and I'm under strict orders to text him as soon as you wake up."

He's about to text when I reach over and grab his wrist. Even though every part of me is screaming for Matvey and the safety he makes me feel, I don't want to be a burden to him, and I don't want him to see me as weak. "Let's wait a while. I don't want him to feel like he needs to rush back here. He deserves to have some fun."

"He will be really pissed when he finds out about this," Lev warns, but I see his lip ring lift with his smirk, and I know I've got him. "Of course, we both know it's impossible for him to be mad at you, so you can just tell him it was your idea."

"I will. I promise." This time it's me who nudges his arm. "Want to see if I can still kick your ass in that racing game?"

He gives a soft laugh. "You beat me in video games, and Matvey kicks my ass in pool every damn time. Between the two of you, I'm starting to get an inferiority complex."

"Matvey's still playing pool?"

Lev nods. "His insomnia has been really bad these last two years, so he's had a lot of time to practice. He's gotten freakishly good. I'm not going

to tell you how many times he's beaten me. It's embarrassing."

"It's a good thing you're a deadly underground fighter. That's got to help the ego."

"It does," he admits with a laugh. "Come on, little sis. Let's see if you've still got it."

I follow him out of the room, ignoring the part of me that desperately wants to call Matvey and tell him to hurry home. I already feel like a massive burden, though, and I don't want him to feel like he can't even leave the apartment. Telling myself I'll be okay for another hour or two, I wait for Lev to see if Jolene wants to join us and then meet them in the game room. No matter how much I try to lose myself in the game, my mind keeps returning to Matvey, wondering what he's doing and hoping like hell that whatever it is it's hurting Konstantin like a motherfucker.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 6

Matvey

The sound of Konstantin's ribs breaking should make me feel better, but it doesn't. I'm an optimist, so I shatter his nose next, hoping that'll be the crunch that brings a smile to my face, but nothing is working. I punch his bloody, swollen face one last time, leaving him swinging on the chain. He's close to passing out—eyes fluttering, pupils trying like hell to focus. None of it brings me any joy.

I've spent the last two years focusing on this moment, on getting revenge for everything that was done to Alina. It's what got me through those long days when I was drowning in worry and all the fears of what was being done to the woman I love, but now, thanks to Katya's sketchbook, I no longer have to guess at what happened. I know exactly what he did to her, and that's why I'm here now instead of lying next to Alina like I should be. I'd convinced myself that once I had my hands on the fucker who took her I'd feel better. Furious that I don't, I give him another hard punch, breaking another rib that finally tips him over into unconsciousness.

"Fuck man, just kill us already."

I look over at where Osip is hanging a few feet away. His hands are high above his head, but he's low enough so that his toes touch the ground. He's in no danger of a slow suffocating death, unfortunately. His face is swollen and bloody like his brothers, but he's gotten off easy so far.

"You're getting a slow death. I told you that already."

"I never even fucking touched her."

His petulant tone rubs me the wrong way, just like everything else about him does. I step closer, ignoring the pain in my knuckles, the split skin and

blood that drips from my hands. It takes a lot of pain to faze me, and this isn't even close to being enough.

When we're only inches apart, I give him a smirk. "You smell like shit, Osip."

"Fuck you."

He throws the words out, but it's lackluster at best. The fight is leaving him even quicker than I expected.

"Tell me what you know, Osip."

"About what?"

"You know about what. Make me ask again and see what happens."

He hesitates but not for long. Osip is all about covering his ass, and he still thinks there might be a way out of this for him. Hope is often the last thing to die. In my experience it fades right before the last beat of the heart. I'm going to enjoy seeing the spark die in this fucker.

"You want to know about Nadia?"

Reaching out, I grab his throat hard enough to have my fingers digging into his fragile skin.

"Her name is Alina."

Tightening my hold on his neck, the threat is there without me having to say a word, and when I ease off enough so he can speak, he sputters out a quick, "Alina, fuck, I'm sorry."

Stepping back, I wait for him to go on. He lets out a dramatic cough like I'm supposed to be concerned that he has a sore throat. When I don't run to get him a lozenge, he sighs and says, "What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

He glances over at his brother, and when he's satisfied that he's still passed out, he looks up at me and says, "She was taken from Moscow. At the time our men were under strict orders to grab the names they were given, but we also gave them a bit of leeway. They could take someone who wasn't on the list if she was worth it and the timing was right. Your girl was in the wrong place at the wrong fucking time, and she caught the attention of one of our men. It was nothing personal."

"Nothing personal?"

My tone has him quickly backtracking. "I mean she wasn't chosen to get back at you. We didn't even know who the fuck you guys were. She fought like hell when she was taken and gave us a fake name. We thought she was just a nobody, some young, beautiful girl who'd go missing and

eventually be forgotten about. When Konstantin saw her, I don't know, it's like he had to have her. The women had already been sorted, so he knew she was a virgin."

"That mattered to him?"

"He wouldn't have touched her if she'd already been with someone else. She would've been sold at the auction. Her fate was sealed when he walked the line like he always does, looking at each and every woman, and she raised her face to his and spit." He gives a harsh laugh at the memory. "I've never seen anything like it. In that moment, she became his. Konstantin likes them feisty but only because he gets off on breaking them."

I swallow my disgust and rage and ask, "What else?"

His blue eyes meet mine. "You know what else."

"I want to hear you say it."

He pulls against his chain to try and relieve some pressure from his shoulders. All it does is make him wince in agony before he gives up with a heavy sigh. "He raped her."

Even though I know he did, every word is still like a knife to my goddamn heart. "Did you?"

"No, fuck no." His voice rises with each word. "No one touched her but him."

I pull a pair of pliers from my back pocket and hold them up, smiling when his face goes a shade paler. "You wanted to, though, didn't you? And you would have if he would've allowed it."

"No," he starts to protest, but I'm tired of listening to him. Ignoring his attempts to persuade me that he's not a sex-trafficking asshole who enjoys raping women, I reach up and slip one of his fingers between the blades. The sound of metal cutting through bone is almost enough to calm me. His screams fill the garage, waking Konstantin before I've even gone through the second finger. When there are four fingers lying at my feet, I hear Vitaly's voice behind me.

"Well that's just gross."

His words are muffled, and when I look over my shoulder at him, I can see why. With a half-eaten corndog in one hand, he smiles around the bite he's still chewing.

"You're the one who chose to eat a corndog."

He shrugs his shoulders and laughs when I cut off another finger. "I was hungry. You want one? I made extra."

“No thanks. I’m good.”

I step back and holler for Timofey. Seconds later, he’s walking into the garage, smiling at my handiwork. I wave a hand at Osip. “Get the blowtorch and stop the bleeding.”

He walks over to the shelf mounted on the back wall and grabs the blowtorch.

“Fuck, please no,” Osip moans, but Timofey’s already turning it on. The smell of charred flesh forces me into a memory I don’t want, but nothing is going to stop me from getting my pound of flesh, not even the screams of my dead sister.

When he passes out, I look at Konstantin. “Looks like it’s your turn.”

“Hold on,” Vitaly says, walking closer. “Seriously, I have like one bite left. Don’t cut off any more fingers until I’m done chewing.”

“You’re never going to get away with this.”

We both look at Konstantin. He’s trying like hell to appear like the tough Bratva boss he’s used to being, but there’s no hiding the fear that’s starting to creep into his eyes.

Vitaly points his now empty corndog stick at him. “We already have.”

“You’re going to piss off a lot of people,” he warns. “A lot is riding on the upcoming auction, and when it’s canceled, some very important people are going to want to know why.”

I laugh and slip the bloody pliers into my back pocket before pulling out my knife. “No one knows we’ve taken over,” I tell him. “The auction is still set for next month, and as far as everyone else is concerned, you’re still running the Lebedev Bratva and everything is as it should be.”

He eyes the knife before meeting my eyes. “Who is she to you?”

“Everything. She’s everything to me, and you took her from me and treated her like a goddamn animal.”

“There’s no way to work through this? You know I have money.”

“I don’t give a fuck about your money, and I’m sure it’s hard for your pompous ass to understand, but there’s no amount of money you could offer me that would make me forget about what you did.”

His eyes dart around the garage, eyeing first me and then Vitaly and finally Timofey, who’s waiting off to the side, blowtorch in hand. As much as I hate the bastard, Konstantin isn’t an idiot. He knows this isn’t going to end well for him, and I can see the way his mind is racing to find a solution, to find some way to get his ass out of this mess. When I see the corner of

his mouth lift up in a smirk, I know he's going with the *I'll piss him off in the hopes of a quick death* route.

"Maybe I should tell you about my first time with your sweet Alina. She was so fucking tight, Matvey." He groans at the memory as my hand tightens around the handle of the knife. "Want me to tell you about how she bled all over my cock? Or about how she cried so damn sweetly while I fucked her?"

"Easy, brother," Vitaly says, coming to stand next to me.

I take a breath, willing myself to calm down so I don't lose control. When I know I'm not in danger of sinking my blade into his chest, I smile at the man who's hanging in front of me, completely at my mercy.

"Nice try, but I've waited too goddamn long for this. You made the woman I love cry? You made her bleed? Let's see how creative I can get with you." I point the blade at his face. "I've already made you bleed. I wonder how long it'll take to make you cry."

I press the serrated edge of the blade to his index finger and start sawing. I'm not nice about it. This isn't a quick snip of bone like I'd done to Osip. This is slow—a back-and-forth motion that would be difficult for the most hardened of men to tolerate. Konstantin may be strong, and he may not be a stranger to torture, but he's never been on the receiving end of it. He screams and eventually begs when I'm almost halfway through, and finally when the finger drops to the floor and I start on the next one, he begins to cry, the tears mixing with blood and snot. I don't stop, and when I've cut off every finger on his right hand, Timofey cauterizes the five stubs while I check my phone. She should be awake by now, but there's no new messages or missed calls.

I eye Konstantin's unconscious body before looking at Osip. He's just as pale as his brother, forehead leaning against his bicep as he hangs from his chain. He avoids my eyes, trying like hell to not draw my attention. Too fucking late. The second they touched Alina, they earned my full attention, and even though I'm confident they regret ever taking her, it's not enough for me. They'll pay for that mistake with their lives.

Turning my back on everything, I call Lev. It rings twice before he answers, and each ring sends my heart into a faster rhythm.

"Is she still asleep?" I ask, ignoring his hello.

I can hear the video game noises over the sigh he gives. "She didn't want you to feel like you needed to come rushing back." His voice sounds

further away when he says, “I told you he’d be pissed.” Putting his mouth back to the phone, I hear, “Hang on, brother, she’s right here.”

A second later I hear the voice I’ve been craving. “Sorry, Matvey.”

“Are you okay, *malishka*?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. We’ve just been playing some games.”

Despite what she’s saying, I can hear something in her voice that has me quickly forgetting about the two men hanging in the large, four-car garage.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can, baby. I’m sorry you had to wake up alone.”

“Lev was there, and I know why you left.” She’s silent for a few seconds. “How’s it going?”

“Slowly, just like I want,” I tell her, sparing her the gruesome details. “There’s still a long way to go.”

She knows I’m telling her they’re still alive, so when she whispers, “good,” I smile and clean the blood from my blade.

“Do you need me to get you anything on the way?”

“No, just hurry back.”

“I’m leaving now, *malishka*.”

She says a quick goodbye before hanging up. I turn to Timofey, who’s laughing with Vitaly about something. “Make sure they get enough food and water to stay alive. Strip them and spray them off when the smell gets too bad. Have Pyotr keep a close watch over them. They’re not allowed to die yet.”

“Will do, boss,” Timofey says, walking over to put the blowtorch back on the shelf so it’s ready for next time before he pulls his phone out to text Pyotr, one of our enforcers who’s also a trained medic. I know he’ll make sure they don’t hang for too long at one time or give them an antibiotic if they need one. An infection is not how these two are going to go out. I won’t fucking allow it.

“Playtime over?” Vitaly asks.

“Yeah, she’s awake. We need to go back.”

Vitaly nods and smacks Timofey’s shoulder on our way out. “See you later, man.”

“I’ll be here.” Timofey laughs and waves an arm out. “Nicest place I’ve ever had to lay low at. Sure beats that dump in Moscow. You remember that?”

“I’m not sure you ever forget roaches that big.” I dart my eyes at Vitaly. “I still remember him screaming when one crawled over his hand.”

Vitaly grimaces at the memory. “That fucker was huge, and it was a manly scream, not a high-pitched girlie one.”

I raise a brow at him. “Does that make it better?”

He laughs. “It does, yes.”

Timofey laughs as we walk out. I stop in the kitchen, scrubbing the blood off my hands and forearms while Vitaly talks to our men, making sure everything’s still going as planned. Before we leave the mansion, I turn to look at them.

“Timofey and Pyotr are in charge of them until I come back. No one else touches them. I don’t care what they say. I don’t care what they promise you. They’re mine to kill, and if anyone takes that from me, they’ll be the ones strung up in that garage.”

I keep my focus on them until I’m confident that no one is going to disobey me on this. It helps that over the last two years I’ve earned myself a reputation for being slightly unhinged. Everyone knew I was going crazy trying to find Alina, and stories of how I lost it one night and killed five of Konstantin’s men are still being spread through the ranks. None of our men are stupid enough to get between me and my revenge, but it’s nice to remind them every now and then of how serious I am.

“Yes, sir,” they say, keeping their eyes down, waiting for us to leave.

When we’re in my Camaro, Vitaly laughs. “How many people are you going to make shit themselves today? Because you’re on a fucking roll, brother.”

“I know how easy it is to lose your temper, and Konstantin wants a quick death. He’ll tell them whatever he thinks will earn him a quick bullet to the head.”

“True, but Timofey’s in charge, and nothing gets under that man’s skin. They’re yours to kill,” he reassures me. “No one’s going to take this from you.”

I nod at our men who are now manning the gate outside the Lebedev property and speed down the road, anxious to get back to Alina. I know she’s safe and that my brothers would never let anything happen to her, but I’d heard the anxiety in her voice. I feel it inside myself, too. If I can’t see her or touch her, it makes me nervous. It’s not healthy, but I’m not sure how to stop it.

I’m so focused on getting back to her as quickly as possible that it takes me a second to realize Vitaly’s asking me a question.

“What?”

“I said we should stop and grab some supper.” He points out the window at the restaurant up ahead, and my first instinct is to shake my head because I don’t want to take the time to do it, but then he says, “She needs to eat, man, and you know how much she loves chicken fingers.”

He’s not wrong, so with a frustrated sigh, I pull into the drive-thru and get behind a large truck. Tapping my fingers against the steering wheel, I glance at the clock, worrying that everything is taking too damn long. When we’re finally at the menu, I place a ridiculously large order because Vitaly keeps talking over me and adding new things onto the list.

“Add one more fucking thing,” I warn him.

He smirks at me, giving a soft laugh when he sees how pissed I’m getting, and then hollers, “Ten chocolate chip cookies!”

He’s still laughing when I gun the engine and pull up to the first window to hand over my card.

“Come on, brother. You have to admit that was funny, and you should be thanking me. If we show up without chocolate chip cookies, the pregnant women will circle us and go in for the kill. You don’t fuck around with chocolate, and my wife’s cravings have been strong. Here.” He puts a straw in one of the drinks and hands it to me. “You’ll feel better once you have some root beer. I think your blood sugar is low. That tends to make people grumpy. That’s why I try to snack every couple of hours.”

“Is that why?” I take the drink he offers, not admitting that it tastes fucking delicious and hits the damn spot.

He laughs like he can read my mind and steals one of the chicken fingers out of the bag so he can nibble on it for the last bit of the drive. It takes both of us juggling several bags and drinks to get everything up to the penthouse, and as soon as I set it down on the kitchen island, I go searching for Alina. I find her sitting on the couch in the game room with Lev and Jolene. She’s holding a remote, but when she hears me, she loosens her grip on it and looks over. When her eyes meet mine, her shoulders relax and her eyes soften. I can see the relief washing over her, and in seconds I’ve crossed the room and pulled her into my arms. Burying my nose in her hair, I breathe her in, letting the familiar scent calm me.

“I’m here, baby,” I whisper.

I feel her nod as her arms tighten around me. I look up in time to meet Lev's eyes before he and Jolene walk out of the room, leaving us alone.

"I'm sorry. I swore I wasn't going to be weak or needy."

I cup her face and tilt her head so I can see her. "You could never be weak or needy, and I missed you just as much as you missed me."

"I don't want you to feel like you can't leave the apartment, like you have to babysit me or like I'm a burden."

I kiss the skin between her eyebrows where she's furrowing it in worry and smile at her. "I could never think of you as a burden, and you have no idea how badly I want you to always be next to me."

"Is it weird that I missed you this much when you weren't even gone that long?"

"Is it weird that I only felt like I could breathe again when I saw you in front of me?"

I run my thumb over her cheek, and she gives me a soft smile. "We're quite the fucked-up pair, Matvey."

"We are, baby, but to me you'll always be perfect." She leans into my touch, pressing my scarred palm against her soft skin. "Vitaly and I brought back food."

She sighs at the mention of another meal. "I feel like I just ate."

"It's been hours," I remind her. "And it's chicken fingers. I even ordered you curly fries." She musters up a small smile for me, but I vividly remember every detail of those damn drawings. The way she'd been chained naked to the fucking table, a plate of food on the floor just out of reach, is something I'll never get out of my head.

"Want me to fix us a couple of plates and bring it to our room?"

She lets out a sigh of relief and nods while keeping my palm pressed firmly against her skin. "Do you think they'll mind?"

"Not at all, baby. Everyone understands how hard this is for you." I kiss her forehead and take a step back. "I'll get the food and meet you in there."

When I run back upstairs, the others are already sitting at the table and digging into their food. Katya's decided to go the dessert-first route. She smiles and holds up the last few bites of her cookie.

"Thanks for stopping, Matvey. I've been craving chocolate like crazy."

Vitaly raises a brow at me in an *I fucking told you so* look, so I smile and say, "You're welcome. Vitaly didn't want to stop, but I insisted."

“Yeah, that’s exactly how it went down,” Vitaly says with a laugh, popping another curly fry in his mouth. “You know me, *ptichka*, I never want to stop for food.”

They laugh while I busy myself fixing two plates. I give Alina extra in the hopes that she’ll eat it, and then balance it all in a maneuver that would make any waitress proud as I slowly walk downstairs. She hears me coming and opens the door for me, reaching out to grab some of it before it falls.

“Please tell me you don’t expect me to eat all this?” She eyes the food with a worried look on her face, and all I can think about are those damn drawings of Alina’s gaunt, naked frame and the plate of food that was always just out of reach. She used to love food. She could keep up with Vitaly whenever we’d order pizza and she never shied away from anything, but things have changed, and I’m willing to do whatever it takes to help her. Setting my own plate aside, I grab hers and wrap an arm around her waist, leading her to the rocking chair in the corner.

“What are you doing?”

I sit and pull her into my lap. “I’m feeding you, *malishka*.”

“Matvey,” she starts to say, but I dip a chicken tender into the honey mustard sauce and press it between her lips, silencing whatever argument she was about to make. I smile at the raised brow she gives me, but she takes a bite and starts chewing all the same.

“That’s my girl,” I tell her, watching her finish the bite before giving her another. I’m going to change mealtimes for her. Instead of being chained up and denied what she needs, she’s going to be in my lap while I feed her like the queen she is. I have no problem spoiling her. If anyone deserves to be babied, it’s her.

I smile when she grabs a fry and brings it to my lips. “You need to eat, too.”

She tells me about hanging out with Lev and Jolene while we take turns feeding each other, and soon I’m switching out plates and we’re on our second root beer. When I hold up another tender and she shakes her head with a groan, I finish it myself and then set the plates aside.

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For eating something. I was starting to really worry.”

She leans back, resting her head against my shoulder. Her slight weight on my thigh is a constant reminder that one high calorie meal isn’t going to

be enough to fix everything and get her back to where she was, but it's a start.

Her fingers fidget with my hoodie. "It helps when you feed me. It's so different that it takes me out of my head, and no one else has ever done it, so I don't associate it with anything bad."

"I'm glad it helps." I run my fingers through her dark hair as my other hand stays on her waist, keeping her close to me. "I'll feed you for the rest of our lives."

She gives a soft laugh. "I'm hoping it won't take me that long to get back to normal."

"I enjoy doing it. Maybe I won't want to stop."

"We might get some funny looks at restaurants."

"Fuck 'em," I say, making her laugh again. "I don't give a shit about anyone else, Alina. If this is what you need from me, then this is what you're getting, and I don't give a flying fuck what anyone else thinks about it."

I hold her and run my fingers through her hair, feeling her relax even more.

"Do you want to watch a movie?"

"Sure, but I want to get in my pajamas first."

She hops up to go get changed while I switch my jeans for some comfy joggers. Since I'm still wearing the hoodie I had on while torturing the Lebedev brothers, I pull it off and exchange it for a black, long-sleeve tee. When she steps out of the bathroom in a pair of plaid flannel pajama bottoms and another one of my hoodies, I smile and pat my thigh, letting her know where I want her. Walking over to me, she sits back on my lap as I hand her the remote and the blanket I brought over.

While she scrolls through the channels, I spread the blanket over her lap and rest my feet on the ottoman. She finds a movie she thinks we'll both like and curls up against me.

"Why do you have a rocking chair?"

I smile and start stroking her hair again. "We all went baby shopping one day, and Vitaly and I saw these and wanted to get them for our sisters-in-law. Once we tested them out at the store, we saw how comfortable they are and figured we should each have one, too, since we'll be babysitting a lot."

“Well, it’s a good thing you got them since Vitaly’s going to need one soon anyway.”

“He is,” I agree.

“I can’t believe they’re all having babies.”

“I know. It still surprises me when I see them with their wives sometimes. The other day I caught Vitaly reading a pregnancy book, and he had the biggest grin on his face while he was doing it. Can you imagine him doing that a few years ago?”

Alina smiles and shakes her head. “God no. He always said putting a woman’s number in his phone was too much of a commitment.”

I laugh, remembering all the times he’s told me that over the years. Alina watches the movie for several minutes before whispering, “Can I ask you about what happened while you were gone?”

“You can ask me anything you want, baby.”

“How are they?”

I sigh and run my fingers through her hair. “When I left they were both hanging from a chain in their garage. They’re being given just enough food and water to keep them alive, and they don’t have as many fingers as they did when they woke up this morning.”

“Do you think they regret any of it?”

There’s no way in hell I’m going to lie to her, so I don’t. “They regret it but only because they’re paying for it now. There’s no true remorse, and I doubt there ever will be. I knew that when I started this. They’re not capable of it, but I can make them hurt, and that’s enough for me. True regret and remorse wouldn’t change anything anyway. There’s no changing what’s happened. There’s no way to make it better, but I can make them feel pain. I can give them a glimpse of what you felt, and I can make sure their last days on earth are filled with constant suffering.”

She’s quiet for so long that I start to worry that I’ve upset her, but then she rests her hand on my chest and whispers, “Thank you, Matvey.”

“You don’t need to thank me, *malishka*. I can’t take back what they did to you. I wish I could, but I can’t. Making them hurt is the very least I can do.”

I stroke her hair and gently rock us as we watch the movie. She’s asleep long before it’s over, but there’s no way I’m letting her go, so I fall asleep in the chair with her, not waking until I feel her body shaking and the heat of her silent screams hitting my neck.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 7

Alina

Konstantin's face looks down at me before he pulls back his hand and hits me again. Pain floods my head, darkening my vision as I try to curl up into a ball to protect myself from the next hit.

"You think you get to say no to me, pet?"

His angry words send a shiver of ice-cold fear down my spine. Every part of me is tense, bracing for what I know is coming, but knowing it isn't enough to prepare me for the kick that hits my ribs with a force that has bile rising to the back of my throat. I suck in air, crying out at the piercing pain, but he doesn't stop. He kicks me again and again until I'm crying and hyperventilating and finally vomiting all over myself and the floor.

"Fucking disgusting," he snarls, fisting my hair and shoving my face in the mess I've made. He pins the side of my head to the floor, coating my face in vomit as he leans closer. "When I say to spread your legs, you fucking spread them. Because you fought me, I'm going to fuck you just like this." He smacks my side, pulling a whimper from me. "I'm pretty sure you have at least one cracked rib. Every breath you take is going to be agony, not to mention you're caked in your own filth. All this could've been avoided, pet, but you had to be a bitch about it. Let's see if you think it was worth it."

It wasn't. Each thrust pulls a scream from my throat, and the smell of my own vomit has my body threatening to do it all over again.

"Alina!"

Matvey's voice cuts through my nightmare, slowly pulling me from Konstantin's brutal touch. The furious look in his blue eyes is replaced with dark eyes that are filled with worry and love, and the abusive, angry assault

on my body changes to a pair of strong arms, embracing me like I'm the most precious thing in the world.

With a ragged breath, I exhale and force myself to relax. My body shakes as Matvey rocks me and strokes my back. I should be embarrassed to be babied to such a degree by him. I can only eat if he feeds me, and now I'm being comforted like I'm a small child, but I can't bring myself to stand up and leave the safety of his embrace. It feels nice, and I just want to feel safe.

"I've got you, baby," he murmurs against my skin, kissing my forehead and surrounding me with his warmth.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

"No, *malishka*. I told you before. No apologies. I will always be here when you need me. I just want to take care of you."

The sun is just now starting to rise, and as Matvey rocks me, I rest against him, so fucking grateful to have him.

"There's nothing wrong with letting someone comfort you," he reminds me. "It doesn't make you weak. You're the strongest person I know, Alina. I'm in complete awe of you, baby."

I clutch his shirt, not trusting myself to speak without crying. He rocks me back to sleep, and I don't open my eyes until I hear a loud knock at the door and Vitaly hollering at us.

"You guys have to see this!" He laughs before adding, "Roman's on his way back, you're going to want to see his reaction when he gets here."

"I guess this is what he and Katya have been up to," Matvey says, stretching his legs out and rolling the kinks out of his neck.

I sit up and rest my hand on his chest. "You can't keep sleeping like this. You're going to be so sore."

He gives me one of his rare, full smiles, looking ridiculously adorable for having his sleep completely fucked up.

"I told you this rocking chair is comfortable, and there was no way in hell I was going to move you off my lap. I love holding you while you sleep."

I cup his face, running a thumb through his dark stubble as he leans into my touch. I wish I was capable of giving him more right now, but he doesn't pressure me. He just kisses my palm and smiles at me when I get up to use the bathroom. I still need to shower, so I don't bother changing out of

my pajamas. I just brush my teeth and wait for Matvey to do the same before we leave the room together.

Matvey threads his fingers through mine, holding my hand as we join the others in the kitchen. They're crowded around the island, and when we get closer, I see the laptop they're staring at. The screen is filled with a black-and-white image of the parking garage, and as soon as Matvey sees it, he laughs.

"You didn't," he says to a smiling Vitaly.

"I did." Vitaly pulls Katya closer and laughs again. "He should be here any minute."

I lean closer to see the image better, but all I can see is Matvey's Camaro, the black SUV that we drove in the other night, an Aston Martin, Lev's motorcycle, and next to that is a blue minivan that must belong to one of the other tenants.

Looking over at Vitaly, I ask, "What did you do?"

He points to the minivan. "We bought that for Roman."

I laugh and look back at the screen. "You bought my brother a minivan?"

Vitaly nods while Matvey asks, "What did you do with his Porsche?"

"We paid to park it in the garage down the street," Vitaly says, still laughing.

Lev shakes his head. "He's going to fucking kill you."

"Maybe." Vitaly shrugs his shoulders. "Or maybe he'll drive it and fall in love."

"Yeah, that's what's going to happen," Danil says while Simona laughs and smiles at her husband.

"Emily's going to kill you for stressing him out like this when he's healing from a gunshot wound," Jolene points out, but Vitaly just laughs again.

"It's good for him. He needs to learn to relax. This will help him."

"I'm not so sure about that," I tell him.

"We're about to find out." Matvey points to the screen. "Here's hoping the doc has him on some good painkillers and it takes him a few days to even notice the Porsche is gone.

I give a soft laugh as we gather around to watch the black SUV pull up to the private elevator. The driver gets out, walking around to open the back door for Roman and Emily. She gets out first, resting a hand on her stomach

as Roman follows her. He wraps his uninjured arm around her and nods to the driver before he disappears back into the SUV and drives off. Instead of heading straight for the elevator, we watch Roman's head turn to where his beautiful Porsche would usually be parked. Vitaly laughs as Roman looks around and then shakes his head before turning to look directly into the security camera. He raises his middle finger, making Vitaly laugh even harder, and then steps into the elevator with Emily.

"You might want to run and hide," Lev tells him.

"He's injured. I can outrun him." He turns to me and smiles. "Ready to see how pissed your brother can get?"

"Oh, I know how pissed," I tell him. "I've had a first-row seat to all the pranks you've pulled on him."

Matvey laughs and pulls me against him, grabbing a sausage biscuit from the counter. He breaks off a piece and holds it to my lips right as the elevator dings. Roman and Emily step off, and his eyes immediately find Vitaly.

"Where the fuck is my Porsche?"

Vitaly cocks his head and furrows his brow in confusion. "Hmm?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Where's my Porsche, and why is there a goddamn minivan in my parking spot?"

"Oh, you mean that super reliable and family-safe vehicle?" He gives a soft laugh. "You're welcome." He turns to Emily and adds, "The car salesman assured me it was the safest option for a young, growing family. Plus, he's going to look sexy as hell driving it, don't you think? Fucking kick-ass."

Emily bites her lip to keep from laughing while Roman's face turns an unhealthy red. He points a finger at Vitaly while Matvey discreetly feeds me another bite of biscuit.

"I'm not fucking around. Where's my Porsche?"

"I didn't want to fork over all that cash, Roman, so I did a trade-in." He gives another laugh. "I swear I made the car salesman come in his fucking pants when I handed over the keys." He sighs and adds, "I wish you could've been there to see it."

"Babe, the doctor said you need to take it easy," Emily reminds him when Roman looks like he's seconds away from throwing himself at a still-grinning Vitaly.

“You should definitely rest,” Vitaly tells him. “When you’re feeling better, we can take it for a test drive. It’s pretty smooth.” He looks over at Lev. “It does zero to sixty in what? Like three minutes?”

Lev’s laughing too hard to answer while Roman looks between the two, unwilling to believe that they’ve actually done this atrocity. Matvey slips me another bite before my brother turns his eyes to me.

“Tell me they’re joking, Alina.”

I meet the devilish look Vitaly is giving me and tell my brother, “They did say it was the safest option, Roman.”

“Jesus Christ,” he groans, and I’m afraid he may actually start crying.

Vitaly takes pity on him. “Look, all we’re asking is that you give it a try. If you still hate it in a few weeks, we can get you another Porsche.”

“A few weeks? Fuck that, I’m going to get one right fucking now.”

“Oh no you’re not,” Emily says, locking her arm around his waist and leading him to the bedroom. “You and I are on strict orders to rest as much as possible, and if I have to be stuck in that damn bed all day, then so do you.”

Vitaly laughs as they walk by. “I’m sure you can think of something to keep yourselves entertained. We’ll leave food by your door like we did after you got married.”

Roman flips us all off before they disappear down the hall. I look over at Vitaly. “He’s never going to forgive you for this one.”

He just smiles at me. “Sure he will. Once he sees his precious Porsche again, he’ll forget all about how pissed he was.”

“Maybe,” Matvey says, “or maybe he’ll just get in that damn minivan and run you over with it.”

“That’s a good point. I’ll make sure I’m standing by Emily when all is revealed.”

“That’s probably not a bad idea,” Katya says, laughing when he picks her up and carries her off.

Danil and Simona follow shortly after, and then Lev and Jolene leave to pick up some more baby supplies. Once the kitchen is empty again, Matvey feeds me another bite.

“Danil gave me the number to a therapist here in the city. She specializes in sexual abuse and trauma, and I’d really like it if you’d talk with her.”

When I hesitate, he adds, “I may have already called her and set up an appointment.”

“Matvey, you didn’t.”

“I’m sorry, *malishka*, but you need to talk to someone. Just one appointment, that’s all I ask.”

He feeds me another bite while I think about it. “What did you tell her about me?”

“I told her you were a victim of sex trafficking. I was vague about the details and made it seem like it all took place in Europe so she won’t feel like the police around here need to be involved in it.” He holds up another bite to my lips. “She agreed to speak with you here, but if you’d rather meet at her office, I can drive you there.”

I raise a brow at him and finish chewing. “When’s my first appointment?” I ask, knowing he’s already set one up.

He gives me a *please don’t be mad* smile. “Today at three.”

I should be upset that I wasn’t asked about any of this, but I know he’s right. I do need to talk to someone, and I’d much rather it be here at the penthouse instead of in some strange office. He thinks I’m angry, so when I open my mouth to say something, he shoves another piece of biscuit between my lips.

“I’m not mad,” I tell him, mumbling around my food.

He kisses my forehead and pulls me in for a hug. “As much as I want to be the one to make everything better for you, I know that you need a professional who can help you in ways that I can’t. You also need a place where you feel safe talking about whatever you need or want to talk about. You want to spare me certain details, and I understand why you do it, baby, but I don’t want you to have to do that. You need to be able to let it all out.”

“I know,” I whisper against his chest. “Thanks for calling her for me.”

He cups the back of my head and pulls me into a tighter hug. “Thanks for agreeing to speak with her.”

When he pulls back, he finishes feeding me the sausage biscuit before grabbing something for himself. We spend the rest of the morning and afternoon together until it’s time for my appointment with Dr. Taylor. Matvey doesn’t disappear on me, even though he sends a few texts and I know he’s checking in on Konstantin and Osip.

“It’s okay if you need to go,” I tell him, but he just shakes his head and kisses my forehead.

“They’re not going anywhere, *malishka*. I want to be here with you.”

When Dr. Taylor arrives, Matvey goes down to meet her so she can access the elevator. When the doors open, I watch Matvey step out followed by a woman in a red, feminine suit that’s clearly been tailored to fit her perfectly. Her blonde hair is in a delicate bun, accentuating her long, slender neck, and her brown eyes soften when they meet mine. She smiles, revealing a dimple in her left cheek and enough smile lines to make me think she’s probably late forties or early fifties. She’s beautiful, but her cheery smile and dimple give her a *girl next door* feel that quickly calms my nerves as I return her smile.

“You must be Alina.” She holds out her hand, shaking mine while she runs her eyes over me. “Matvey said you’d feel more comfortable talking here, but if you ever change your mind and want to come to my office, just let me know.”

“I will, thanks.”

She looks over at Matvey. “Is there a room we can use that’s private?”

“Yeah, I thought one of the rooms upstairs would work.” He holds my hand and leads me towards the stairs. Dr. Taylor follows us as we pass the huge home gym, the rooms for Lev and Jolene, and then Vitaly and Katya’s until stopping outside the last door at the end of the long hall. I saw it when he gave me a tour of the place, and I smile over at him, knowing he’s picked the perfect spot. It’s not a room that anyone really uses, and it’s not one that I’ll associate with anything. It’s a blank canvas in a way, a place for me to tell my truth, to expose my innermost feelings, and then leave, shutting the door behind me.

Dr. Taylor looks at the floor-to-ceiling windows and the two leather loveseats with the midnight blue rug between them and says, “This will be perfect.”

She walks in, setting her messenger bag on the stand beside one of the loveseats and sits down, motioning for me to take the other. Before I do, I hug Matvey and whisper, “Thank you.”

He kisses me and tells me he loves me. “Take as long as you need, *malishka*. Come find me when you’re done.”

He shuts the door as I sit down, facing Dr. Taylor who’s still giving me a soft smile. She reaches into her bag and grabs a pad of paper and a pen.

“If you don’t mind, I’m going to take some notes while we talk.” She holds up her pen and gives a soft laugh. “I prefer the old-fashioned way. I

tried using my laptop, but the constant clicking of the keyboard doesn't tend to put people at ease."

"Yeah, I can see how that would be distracting."

Crossing her legs, she rests the pad of paper on her thigh. I had no idea what to expect when Matvey mentioned a therapist, but Dr. Taylor is very good at what she does and before long I'm telling her my story. I leave out details that will get everyone I love and care about arrested, but I don't hold anything back as far as the abuse goes, and Matvey's right. It does feel good to tell someone. I can share the horrible details without worrying about it being too much for her, about it coloring how she sees me, or that it will change how she treats me. She listens, occasionally jotting down a quick note, but her attention never strays from me.

"This isn't something that's going to just go away," she says when I finally stop speaking. "I know you want everything to go back to normal, but the truth is it's never going to."

When she sees the horrified look on my face, she raises a hand and gives me a reassuring smile. "It won't go back to the way it was because that's impossible, but you can create a new normal. This doesn't have to destroy you. It doesn't have to control the rest of your life. You can have a normal, loving relationship with Matvey, but it's not going to happen overnight. You've experienced extreme trauma, Alina. You were kidnapped, held against your will, and raped on a pretty constant basis. His voice isn't going to want to leave your head."

I nod, wiping a tear from my cheek and then taking the tissue she offers me from her bag with a whispered thanks.

"This isn't going to be easy, but you've survived him already because you're here, free of him and surrounded by people who love you. That doesn't mean the hard part is over, but you can survive him again. You can learn to keep him out of your head. I want to go over a few breathing exercises you can do when you're feeling overwhelmed or for when you wake up from a nightmare."

We sit together, practicing the deep, soothing breaths until it's time for her to leave. Standing, I hold my hand out to her, shaking it once more.

"Thank you, Dr. Taylor. I appreciate you coming here to speak with me."

She gives a soft laugh. "Matvey was very insistent. He cares a great deal for you, and I'm more than happy to meet you here and talk. I'm hoping

you'll want to speak with me again."

Her dark blonde brow rises, waiting for my response, and when I nod, she gives me another smile.

"I'm so glad to hear that. Thank you for trusting me with your story, Alina." She tucks her notepad back in her bag and slings it over her shoulder. "Same time next week okay for you?"

"Yeah, that'll be great. Thank you."

She follows me out of the room, and once we're downstairs, Matvey jumps up from where he's been sitting and waiting on the couch. His eyes run over me, searching my face to make sure I'm okay, and as soon as he's convinced it went well, his shoulders relax and the corner of his mouth lifts in a smile right before he winks at me. He walks over to us, cupping my face when I'm close enough and kissing my forehead.

"I'm so proud of you, baby girl," he whispers in Russian. Switching to English, he looks over at Dr. Taylor. "Thanks for coming."

"Of course. We had a good talk. I'll see you next week, Alina."

She gives us both a smile before walking to the elevator. She won't need a keycard to take the elevator down, so Matvey stays up here with me while she leaves to go back to her office. Instead of asking me what we talked about, he picks me up and kisses my cheek.

"I hope it went well, baby. Thanks for talking to her."

"I like her. Thanks for setting it up. I don't think I would've done it if you hadn't pushed me to."

He rubs my back and carries me to our room when he hears me yawn. I don't know if it's the weight I've lost or just stress in general, but I've felt exhausted lately. Matvey's hyperaware of how I'm feeling, so I'm not at all surprised when he lays me down in bed and grabs the book he's been reading me. I curl up next to him, listening to his voice as I slowly fall asleep.

Over the next week, we fall into a steady routine. Dr. Bianchi called to let me know my results were fine, and as relieved as I am to have one less thing to worry about, the memories continue to haunt me around the clock. Eating is still an issue for me, so Matvey keeps feeding me, but we've been spending more time with everyone else, watching movies together and having gaming competitions. I still wake up from nightmares every night, and it's always to the feel of Matvey's strong arms around me and his raspy voice in my ear telling me that I'm safe. Sometimes during the day, he'll

kiss me goodbye and disappear for a few hours, but he got me a phone, and I know if I text him, he'll immediately come back. I've resisted the urge so far. I know what he's doing, and I know how badly he needs it.

They're all hard at work making sure that everything looks as it should from the outside. With the auction in two weeks, we can't afford for any rumors to come out. Just one hint of something gone wrong, and no one will show. Important reputations and careers are on the line, and none of these men are willing to risk everything for one auction, even if it is such a highly anticipated one.

I've just finished my second appointment with Dr. Taylor and after she's left, Danil comes walking into the living room with his laptop.

"I finally found him."

Matvey and I don't need to ask. We know he's been spending all his time trying to locate the man who bought Dominic's sister. The process ended up being more complicated than anyone anticipated. Casimir had helped set up the system, but a lot of it was done before he started working for Konstantin, and they've had to untangle what had become an extremely complicated web, but if anyone could sort through it all, I knew it'd be Danil.

"The fucker's name is Lars Andersson. He's a forty-year-old investment banker with a wife and two kids. He owns a yacht that he keeps berthed along the southwestern coast of Sweden, and I'm guessing that's where he hides the women he buys. If Isabella Alessi isn't a one-off thing with him, then when he gets tired of them, he probably sails out and dumps their bodies in the sea."

"Jesus," Matvey mutters, tightening his arm around me. "Have you told Dominic?"

Danil pulls his phone out of his pocket. "I'm about to, but I wanted to tell you something else first. Lars's name is on the list of men we have coming to the auction. He reserved his spot months ago. Looks like the bastard is trying to replace another pet."

"Invite him over," Matvey suggests. "Maybe between the five of us we can convince him to be patient for a little bit longer."

Danil lifts a brow at Matvey. "Yeah, that worked so well with you."

Vitaly walks in, obviously having heard the last bit of conversation, because he laughs and says, "You mean the time when he pretended to be

asleep for forty-five fucking minutes and then snuck out when I took a piss so he could torture and kill five men?"

"Technically it was only four." He looks down at me and winks. "Your brother killed the fifth."

"What's going on?" Lev walks in and grabs a drink from the fridge.

Danil sets his laptop down on the counter. "I found who took Dominic's sister, and the bastard already paid for his spot at the auction."

"Danil's going to invite him over, and we need to convince him to wait to act," Matvey adds.

Lev laughs and raises a pierced brow. "Kind of like you then."

"They're never going to let me forget that," he mutters close to my ear. Kissing my head, he leads me to the fridge. He grabs some leftover pasta and heats it up while Danil walks off to call Dominic. When the microwave beeps, he grabs the bowl and tells the others, "We're going to eat lunch before Dominic gets here."

"Yeah, we're going to need your help to talk some sense into him," Lev says, giving me a smile when I walk past.

The others have obviously noticed that Matvey and I are eating our meals separately, but no one ever says anything or makes me feel weird about it. I think they're all just thrilled that I'm eating and very slowly gaining weight.

"All right, *malishka*, time to eat."

I smile at Matvey when he pulls me into his lap and balances the bowl of pasta on his other thigh. Spearing a noodle, he holds it up to my lips. We take turns, eating in a comfortable silence. Anytime I start to feel stupid or like I'm being too much trouble, I remind myself that a few weeks ago, I was chained up and forced to eat off the floor like an animal. So all in all, I'm not doing too bad.

Watching Matvey's face, I smile when he gives me a wink. His dark eyes run over me, always checking to make sure I'm okay, and I'd give anything if I could just lean closer and kiss him like I used to be able to do. Something stops me, though. Something always does. Usually it's the sound of Konstantin's voice in my ear or an image of something he made me do or something he did to me. When that happens, it freezes me in place, making it impossible for me to close the distance between us.

I'm not surprised when Matvey notices the way I've become tense. Setting the fork down, he cups my face and leans in so we're only a couple

of inches apart. I love his eyes. They're one of my favorite things about him, and right now they're searching mine for clues.

"So many worries, baby," he murmurs, "and I wish you'd let them all go. There's no rush, and I'm not going anywhere."

"I miss kissing you, Matvey."

His eyes soften at my words.

"I miss it, too, and when you're ready for that stage, it'll be amazing, but until then, I get to hug you." He caresses my cheek with the pad of his thumb. "I get to touch your beautiful face." He leans closer and kisses my forehead, slowly breathing me in. "And I get to kiss your face and fill my lungs with you, and that's more than enough, *malishka*."

Needing to do something, I clasp my hands behind his neck and rest my forehead against his. "I love you, Matvey." I give a small laugh and add, "I can't remember a single time in my life when I didn't love you."

He smiles at all the memories. "You did a horrible job at hiding it."

"I did, yes. Thanks for being so nice about it. You never made me feel stupid or teased me about it."

"I thought it was sweet, but then as you got older, I knew I was in trouble. It was easier to dismiss it as a cute crush when you were younger, but when you hit seventeen and then eighteen, and you were this gorgeous, young woman that I couldn't look away from, it became very difficult. The night of your eighteenth birthday changed everything. I'll never forget that little black dress or how beautiful you'd looked when you straddled me while wearing it."

"That's a good memory. Those are the things I kept thinking about while I was gone, but then I had to stop. I had to bury all that away, because the truth is they were slowly killing me. Thinking about the best time in your life when you're going through the worst times you've ever experienced is a torture in and of itself, and there was only so much I could endure. I had to shove my memories of you away. I had to keep you locked up tight because not having you was killing me faster than Konstantin was."

He wraps his arms around me, pulling my chest against his in a tight hug as I bury my face against his neck. I kiss his skin, and his whole body stills. It's the first time I've kissed him since he found me, and even though it's not his lips, it still feels just as intimate. His body gives a soft shudder when I keep my lips pressed against his skin, feeling the light scars that are

hidden beneath the tattoos. He threads his hand through my hair, gently cupping the back of my head.

"More than enough, *malishka*," he murmurs, somehow knowing it's exactly what I need to hear.

We stay wrapped in each other until we hear loud Italian coming from above us. Matvey sighs and kisses my temple. "Sounds like Dominic just got here."

I kiss his stubbled cheek, and when I pull back, he's giving me the sweetest smile.

"Thank you."

"For kissing your cheek?"

"Yes. Don't dismiss it like it's a small thing when it means so much to me."

He stands and takes me with him before lowering me to my feet. Kissing the tip of my nose, he gives me another smile. "We'd better go before Lev is forced to shoot him again."

I laugh and take the hand he offers me. The angry Italian grows louder when Matvey opens the door. He looks back at me and rolls his eyes.

"You're about to get a front-row seat to that famous Italian temper. Maybe we'll get lucky and Vitaly's already made popcorn."

"Maybe." I give another laugh and follow him up the stairs.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 8

Matvey

Alina and I walk upstairs to find an angry-looking Dominic and a smiling Vitaly.

"You know I can't understand a goddamn word you're saying, right?" Vitaly asks him, giving a soft laugh that just has Dominic's jaw tensing even more and his nostrils flaring as he forces himself to take a deep breath before he does something crazy like pulling his gun on the grinning Russian in front of him.

"This is good news," Danil reminds him, trying to calm the room down.

"It is." Dominic's words are clipped, and his accent thicker than usual, "and I'm going to fucking kill him."

"You are," Lev agrees, "but don't fly to Sweden to do it. Let the bastard come to you. That's all we're asking."

Dominic looks between us all and scrubs a hand over his jaw. "And what if he decides he doesn't want to come to the auction and he disappears?"

"He won't," Danil assures him. "I've been tracking him, and he was one of the first men to secure his spot at this auction. He's looking forward to it, Dominic, and men like him don't just change their minds. The only way he's not showing up is if he gets scared off because there's an Italian mafia family on his ass."

"And what if he kills another woman before then?" Dominic asks.

With my arm securely around Alina, I look over at him. "You need to decide what you're willing to live with."

"I want my revenge, Matvey. You of all people should understand that, and now you're asking me to wait another couple of weeks?"

“I am,” I tell him. “I waited two fucking years for my revenge, and once we had Konstantin’s name, I couldn’t act on it, but now he’s strung up in a goddamn garage, alive only because I’m allowing him his next breath. Every second is pure hell for him, and I can make it last as long as I want. He and his brother ran one of the most dangerous Bratvas in the world, and now they’re forced to shit themselves and beg for their lives.” I give a soft laugh. “Trust me when I say the wait is worth it. Nothing can change what they did to Alina, but they are paying for it.”

Alina’s arm tightens around my waist, and when I look down at her, she gives me the sweetest smile. There’s nothing I can do to erase the hell he put her through, but I can torture the fuck out of him for her.

“Fine,” Dominic says, pulling my eyes back up to his. He’s watching the two of us, making no attempt to hide the pain in his eyes. No matter what happens, Dominic’s sister will still be dead at the end of it. Killing the man who murdered her will bring him some relief, but it’s never going to take away the pain of losing his sister. I hope it can bring him a little peace, though.

“I told you guys no meetings without me.”

We all turn to see Roman walking down the hall towards us in flannel pajama bottoms and a T-shirt. The inked-up forearms that are usually covered up by his expensive suits are on full display.

“Glad to see you’re feeling better,” Dominic tells him. “You’re very fortunate that the asshole who shot you didn’t hit any nerves.” He gives Lev a pointed look. “You know, like the asshole who shot me.”

Lev’s full mouth splits into a wide grin. “I guess I’m just a better shot.”

Dominic shakes his head at Lev and mutters something in Italian while Roman grabs a water from the fridge and leans against the island.

“So what’d I miss?”

Danil fills him in, and once Roman’s caught up, Dominic says, “I want to be involved in this. I want to know what’s going on, and when the auction happens, my men and I will be right there with you.”

“Of course,” Vitaly says. “We wouldn’t dream of running our Bratva without the Alessi mafia right fucking beside us.” He’s trying to look mad, but I can see the smile playing at his lips.

“It’s an unlikely friendship,” Dominic agrees, “but it works to our advantage. No one fucking suspects it.”

“True.” Vitaly gives him another smug grin. “Just try not to show how much you love me in public. People will start talking, and I do have a reputation to protect.”

“I can tell my husband is driving you crazy again.” Katya walks in, stopping next to Vitaly. She points a finger at Dominic. “I recognize that look. It’s the same one I give when Vitaly’s being insufferable.”

Vitaly laughs and lightly smacks his wife’s ass.

“Insufferable is one way to put it,” Dominic says. “I would’ve chosen a different word.”

“Don’t be mean.” Vitaly laughs even harder at the pointed look Dominic gives him. “Besides, you’re practically family now. Anytime you want to give up the Italian mafia life and join our Bratva, just let me know.”

“That’ll be the fucking day.” Dominic shakes his head and puts his jacket on. “Let me know what the plan is for the night of the auction.”

“Will do,” Danil assures him. “I need to run to the mansion and talk to Casimir about a few things. I want to leak a few details about Konstantin so it seems like he’s still active in the city. We put up a message shortly after the Red Viper burnt down, making it clear that it wasn’t foul play and that no one got hurt.”

“Bet that cost you a lot of money,” Dominic says with a laugh.

Danil smiles. “It didn’t cost us a penny. We have so much fucking dirt on every politician in this city. It didn’t take much to convince them to bury the story and to list it as zero casualties.”

“My poor father-in-law died in a car wreck on his way to a charity function, didn’t you hear?” Roman asks with a harsh laugh. “Way more than the asshole deserved, but we couldn’t expose him without it ruining everything. No one would’ve stepped foot in this city if they knew he’d been killed in the fire that destroyed the Red Viper.”

“You guys have been busy,” Dominic says, and as much as he might wish he could hide it, I hear the respect in his voice. “Mind if I tag along? I’d like to hear what Casimir says, and I’m curious about the Lebedev mansion.”

“Fine with me,” Danil says. “We’re heading there now.”

Alina looks up at me and whispers, “It’s okay if you want to go.”

I smile down at her and kiss her forehead. “I don’t need to go, baby.”

“No, but you want to, and I’m fine with that.” She looks over at Katya and tells me, “We were planning on keeping Emily company today anyway.

We’re going to sprawl out on their giant bed and watch some movies.”

When I hesitate, she adds, “Don’t worry. Roman will be here, too.”

I look over at him, and as much as he’s trying to act like he’s fully recovered, his movements are slower than usual and there’s a tightness to his jaw that isn’t usually there. That bullet may not have done the damage that Dominic’s did, but it’s still taken a toll on him. Plus, he’s not going to risk leaving Emily after she almost went into labor.

Alina kisses my cheek, making everything else fade away except the feel of her soft lips against my skin. Every touch she gives me is a fucking gift, and I’ll never take even the smallest touch from her for granted ever again.

“Go, Matvey. I’ll be fine. I promise.”

I kiss her cheek, cupping the back of her head and splaying my other hand along her lower back. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to drive separate, so text me if you need me, and I’ll immediately leave.”

“I’ll be fine,” she repeats, this time kissing my neck. The feel of her soft lips and the heat of her breath on my skin has me fighting to not grow hard. It’s been a constant battle, and every time I lose the fight against my dick, guilt washes through me. It’s the same feeling I’d get when I’d jerk off while she was missing. Most of the time I’d have nightmares, but every once in a while I’d wake up from a sex dream that felt so fucking real, and my only option was to jerk off, to lose myself in the fantasy because that’s all I had of her. After I’d come, I’d be racked with shame and guilt for allowing myself those few moments of pleasure when I knew she was going through hell, but those few moments of feeling close to her helped keep me sane.

I don’t ever want Alina to feel threatened or pressured by me, so I try to not get hard around her. It’s a losing battle, but I do try. When she kisses my neck again and feels my cock against her hip, she sucks in a quick breath.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers.

No one is paying us any attention, so I tighten my grip on her and bring my lips to the shell of her ear. “No apologies, *malishka*. I love you, and you’re everything to me, so my body is always going to react around you, but it’s nothing you need to worry about or apologize for.”

“I’m sorry I can’t do more.”

“You’re hugging me, your body is pressed against mine, and you kissed my neck. Baby, I’m in fucking heaven right now.”

She lets out a soft, disbelieving laugh, but every word I’m saying is true. This is heaven to me. *She’s* my paradise, and the only one I’ll ever believe in.

“You ready, Matvey?”

I turn to nod at Danil and then kiss Alina’s cheek again. “Text me, and I’ll be here.”

“I know you will be. I’ll be fine, though.” She kisses my neck once more and whispers, “I love you.”

“I love you, too, *malishka*.”

When I pull back, I can’t resist kissing her forehead one last time. She smiles and leans into my touch.

“I’ll be back before supper.” She’s been slowly putting on weight, but I definitely don’t want her missing any meals.

“Okay.” She gives me a small smile. “Tell him I said hello.”

I hear the bitterness in her tone and see the rage that threatens to spill over, but she tamps it down, refusing to let it take over. I meet her blue-green eyes and nod.

“I will, baby, and when he passes out, I’ll force him to wake back up just so I can tell him again.”

The corner of her mouth lifts up a bit more as I leave, giving her one last look before the elevator doors shut. Even though Roman will be in the penthouse, Danil’s already called for some of our men to watch the building. The packed SUV is already parked near our private elevator when the doors open and we all step out. I give them a nod when I pass by on my way to my Camaro.

“Are we sure we don’t want to take Roman’s minivan?” Vitaly asks, laughing at the monstrosity that’s parked in Roman’s spot.

“No, I’d like to get to the mansion at some point today,” I tell him, not trusting that damn thing to go over sixty.

Vitaly leans against it and runs his hand over the top in a loving caress. “This baby can take whatever you want to give it.”

Dominic laughs and opens the door to his car. “You want us to leave you alone with that thing?”

“I’m pissed at your insulting comment, but I’m not so pissed that I’m not going to ride with you because that is one gorgeous car.” Vitaly walks

over, admiring the red Lamborghini as he gives a low whistle and then laughs. “You might want to leave me alone with this one, though”

“Don’t you dare get hard while I’m driving,” Dominic says, pointing over the hood of his car at Vitaly.

“No promises,” Vitaly says, running his eyes over the gorgeous car.

Dominic tries not to laugh and fails.

“You look like the kind of guy who has rules for his car.” Vitaly digs into his pocket and pulls out a package of gummy snacks. “Is this going to be a problem?”

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Dominic growls at him.

Vitaly laughs and shoves the package back in his pocket, appeasing Dominic while my brothers and I give a soft laugh. He’ll be pulling those things back out before they’ve even left the parking garage. It’s going to be a long drive for Dominic, and I’m guessing he’ll be making the drive back alone.

“Keep an eye out for Vitaly,” Lev says, walking over to Danil’s car. “Something tells me we might see him on the side of the road.”

I can easily picture Vitaly eating his gummies while sitting on the side of the road with his thumb out. I laugh and shake my head as I get in my car. I follow the others to the Lebedev mansion, nodding at the men we have keeping guard at the gates before heading down the long driveway and parking near the front door. Before getting out, I send a quick text to Alina.

You still okay, baby? I just pulled up to the house.

The dots immediately appear as she types me a response.

I’m okay. We’re making Roman watch a romance. I think there might be singing in this movie. You should see the pained look on his face.

She secretly takes a photo of him and sends it to me. I’ve never seen Roman look so miserable before, so I immediately send it to everyone else.

Thanks, malishka. That photo is perfect, and I’ve already passed it along.

You’re terrible, Matvey. He’s going to be so pissed I took it.

I send her the short video Vitaly made of Roman losing his shit as he painted the nursery. The man had become obsessed with getting it perfect, and when she responds with several laughing emojis, I have no doubt she’s showing it to Roman, too. He’s already seen it, but you can never see something like that too many times. It’s funny every damn time.

Going in now, baby. Text me if you need anything at all. I love you, Alina.

I love you, too, Matvey, and I will.

I read her text a few more times, still hardly believing that all this is happening. It still feels too good to be true. My eyes drift to the garage doors lined up in front of me. Removing a few more pieces from Konstantin and Osip will probably work just as well as a pinch to convince myself this is all real and that my mind hasn't finally snapped and it's all an elaborate fantasy. Reaching over, I grab the new knife I'd bought the other day. Knowing the sight of it is going to be enough to scare the hell out of them.

The others are already walking inside when I catch up to them. Our men are stationed around the property, but there are several inside as well. Konstantin and Osip are under constant watch, not because I think they might try and escape, they're way too weak for that, but because I need to make sure they don't die. They get water and a few hundred calories a day. It's not nearly enough for them, but starvation takes a long time, so I'm not worried about them dying too quickly. Plus, Pyotr checks them daily, and he's under strict orders to start antibiotics if it looks like they're getting a life-threatening infection. The medic isn't here to make their stay comfortable, though. He'll keep them alive if he has to, but until it's absolutely necessary, they're to be left alone to suffer slowly and painfully.

"How's Casimir doing?" Danil asks Timofey as we walk into the large kitchen. The men have stocked the fridge, and I'm not at all surprised to see Vitaly walk over and grab himself a coke.

"He's very quiet." Timofey leans against the island, scratching at the stubble on his cheek. "He's exactly how I always pictured a hacker." He gives a soft laugh and raises a hand at Danil to soften the insult. "Sorry, man, but computer geeks usually aren't thought of as being ripped alpha males. This guy stays huddled over his computer all damn day. I just want to throw a bottle of vitamins at him and push him into the sun every now and then."

Danil shrugs a broad shoulder at him. "My ripped alpha body makes people assume things, but that's always worked in my favor. It's much better to be the threat they never see coming."

"True enough," Lev says.

"I don't know why you're agreeing to that," Vitaly says with a laugh. "You're not in any way hiding your psycho ass behind your piercings and

tattoos. Everyone knows exactly what they're going to get when they see you."

"That's not true at all." Lev smirks at him. "Everyone assumes I'm dangerous, but only Jolene knows what a huge softie I can be, so what you see is not always what you get."

"He is a big softie," I tell them. "He cried during the movie we watched last night."

Lev narrows his eyes at me. "I didn't fucking cry."

"You sure about that?" I ask.

Everyone laughs while Lev just shakes his head. "For the record, I didn't cry, but there was a part where the dog gets hurt, and it was really fucking sad."

Even though I'm laughing, he's not wrong. It was really fucking sad, and I was getting a little emotional about it, too. Not that I'll ever tell him that.

"My first impression of you guys was spot-fucking-on," Dominic says, watching our interaction.

"And what impression was that?" Lev asks.

"That you're all fucking crazy."

It's impossible to not laugh at Dominic's baffled expression as he tries to puzzle us out. He shakes his head, giving up when we all just keep laughing.

"Come on," Danil says, finally taking pity on him. "Let's go talk to Casimir and see if he's found anything new."

"Meet us in the garage when you're done," I tell them, anxious to get started.

While they head in one direction, the rest of us walk through the door leading into the garage. Two of our men are sitting in the corner on *keep the bastards alive* duty. It's an unpleasant job, and that's why it's been given to our lower-level enforcers. If they want a better job within the Bratva, then they need to earn it. It just so happens that earning a higher position means they're going to be hosing piss and shit off the Lebedev brothers. Everyone has to prove his worth.

"Miss me?" Konstantin groans and levels the one eye that can open on my smiling face. "You're not looking so good."

I'm being generous. He looks like absolute hell. All his fingers and toes are cut off, the wounds cauterized, his nose has remained broken along with

several ribs, and one of his shoulders dislocated the last time I was here and Pyotr had to pop it back into place. Osip isn't looking much better. I've gone easier on him, but not by much. He does still have all his toes, though, so there's that. Both men are hanging naked from their bound wrists. The dick that raped the woman I love is shriveled and nonthreatening at the moment. I'm going to remove it at some point, a process that I've been very open with him about, but I'm not doing it today. I like keeping him in suspense. I like that he worries about it constantly.

I take out my new knife, enjoying the fear I see in his eyes. He's wondering if today is going to be the day I cut off his dick. Continuing to keep him in suspense is tempting, but instead I laugh and shake my head. "This blade is way too sharp for that, Konstantin. When I cut off your dick, it's going to be with a very dull knife."

Lev pulls a couple of lawn chairs over so he and Vitaly can sit and watch.

Stepping closer, I eye the burnt stubs of his fingers. "I know you're hoping like hell an infection will kill you, but I'm not going to allow that to happen, not yet anyway. I'm not convinced you've suffered enough."

He lets out a pained groan. His cracked lips part, trying to form words, but he's exhausted, dehydrated, slowly starving, and in an immense amount of pain. That combination doesn't inspire chatty conversation, so I forgive him for making me wait as he forces out the strained words.

"Please kill me."

I laugh and playfully smack his face. "Not just yet. Alina says hi, by the way."

"We're sorry," Osip groans from beside us. "We're so fucking sorry."

"You are now, yes," I agree, "but we all know you'd still be happily raping and abusing her if we hadn't caught you." I look over my shoulder at Vitaly and Lev. "Makes it feel a bit insincere, doesn't it?"

"It does," Lev agrees.

"Feels a bit insulting to me," Vitaly adds, shaking his head like he's disappointed in them before taking another drink of his coke.

"What about you, Konstantin? Are you really fucking sorry, too?"

He watches me from his good eye, and I can see the hate in the look, but I also see the acceptance. He knows this is the end, and all he wants is for me to get it over with. The last thing I want to do is give him that satisfaction, though, so I raise the knife, dragging the tip of the blade up his

forearm. The knife is deadly sharp, and his skin parts like I'm unzipping it, exposing the raw, red meat beneath. Blood pours from the wound as he grits his teeth and groans. He doesn't want to scream. He fights it more than Osip does, but he always loses the battle with his pride. They all do, eventually.

I finally get my screams when I drag the blade down the back of his calf, nicking his Achille's tendon before I pull back. The sound echos through the garage, bringing a smile to my face as I turn my attention to Osip. Like usual, he breaks before his brother. I've barely cut a path down his arm before he's screaming and crying like a damn baby.

"I'm embarrassed for you," Vitaly tells him. "If your little dick wasn't hanging out, I would've sworn you had a pussy between your legs."

Lev laughs, and Osip has just enough time to hear it before he passes out. The cuts I made are still bleeding freely, desperately in need of stitches, so I walk over to the first-aid kit I have set up in the corner and grab what I need. Osip wakes up when I pierce his skin with the needle and starts screaming again. By the time I'm finished and pouring vodka on the long line of black stitches, he's close to passing out again.

Konstantin keeps his jaw clamped shut while I sew up his calf, and when I get to his arm, his one blue eye watches me sew him back up. I can actually do a really good stitch, but right now I'm not concerned with doing a good job or making it look nice. This fucker's getting the quick-and-ugly method. The stitches are crooked, tied too tightly, and there's not enough of them, but it's keeping him held together and that's all I care about. I meet his glare when I pour the vodka on the cut I just made, smiling when it pulls a scream from him.

"It just never gets old," I tell him with a laugh, lifting the bottle up and taking a drink. I wipe my blade clean while Vitaly and Lev finish off the bottle right as Dominic and Danil walk in. They look between the two men who are a little closer to death than they were an hour ago. Dominic steps closer, eyeing Konstantin, and when he rears back to punch him, I don't stop him. I let him have his hit, but when he pulls back to do it again, I grab his arm and stop him.

"Let me go," he hisses, talking to me but keeping his eyes on the man hanging beside us.

"No. He's mine to kill, not yours."

"He's responsible for what happened to my sister," he growls, trying to pull his hand free. I hold on tighter.

“He is, and I let you have a hit because of it, but he won’t survive the beating you want to give him, and I can’t let that happen.”

Seeing a sliver of hope, Konstantin laughs and says, “Did I fuck your sister, too? I don’t remember any feisty Italians, but when you fuck enough pussy, it all starts to run together.”

I grip Dominic’s hand tighter, waiting for him to meet my eyes. When he does, they’re filled with pain and rage and a sanity that’s threatening to quickly slip away.

“He wants you to kill him. He never touched your sister, and we both know it. You have your name, and you’re going to get your revenge, but I can’t let you end this fucker’s suffering. I’m not done with him yet.”

It takes a few seconds for the rage to clear, but finally he gives me a small nod right before I feel his hand go slack. He stops fighting me, and when I let him go, he takes a step back, obviously not trusting himself to stay within striking distance of the man he’s dying to kill.

Dominic points a finger at him, and this time his expensive suit isn’t doing shit to hide the killer he actually is. No one could look at him now and see him as anything other than a ruthless mafia boss.

“Your Bratva is gone, your legacy is gone, and when Matvey finally allows you to die, everything you spent your life building will die with you.”

Konstantin tries to laugh, but all he can manage is a wet cough that makes him wince. “You’ll never be able to stop what I’ve put in place. Others will just take over. You haven’t stopped shit. You’ve just delayed it a tiny bit, so fucking congratulations for putting a slight delay on the world’s biggest business.”

“You’re right,” I tell him. “We haven’t stopped sex trafficking, but that was never our goal. Like you said, it’s impossible. There will always be rich assholes who want to buy women, and nothing is going to stop that, but all we wanted was to find Alina and to take down the Bratva responsible for her disappearance, and we’ve done that.”

“We have,” Danil agrees, walking over to stand beside me, “and as luck would have it, we’re going to take down a lot of other fuckers along with you. Casimir’s been very helpful these last few days.”

Konstantin’s eye darts to Danil, surprise widening it enough to let me know he wasn’t expecting this turn of events.

Danil gives a soft laugh. “We’re running everything as if you were still in charge. The auction is still on track, and we’ve spread the word that we’ll be rebuilding the Red Viper. We’re not, of course, but they’ll all be dead before they can figure that out, because Casimir was also kind enough to hack me into your elaborate system. We have the names of everyone who’s ever bought a woman from you, and I gotta say, I was surprised to see so many prominent men listed. We also have the name and location of every club you use to find and hold victims.”

“I think soon there are going to be a lot of explosions all over Europe,” Vitaly says with a smile. “Your name is going to be remembered, but not how you wanted it to be. You’re going to be the sad fuck people mention when they want a laugh or when they want to feel better about their own pathetic lives. A low-level enforcer who isn’t climbing the ranks as fast as he’d like can at least make himself feel better because, hey, at least he’s not like Konstantin Lebedev who died like a little bitch in his own garage.”

“Our mistake,” I say with a grin. “I guess your legacy will live on.”

“I’m your brother-in-law,” Konstantin reminds Vitaly, but if he’s expecting that to inspire some sort of familial bond, he’s in for a disappointment.

“No,” Vitaly tells him, “you’re nothing to me. You treated my wife like shit her entire life. You traumatized her and made her live in fear of you. She’s mine now, and when our baby is born, they’ll be a Melnikov, just like Katya is, and the only uncles they will ever know are my brothers. They will never know about you.”

“Come on, let’s get the fuck out of here,” Lev says, waving a hand at Timofey. “Call us if anything changes and keep an eye on their cuts.”

Timofey nods and says, “I’ll keep a close eye on them.”

“Your wife has the weekend off,” Vitaly tells him. “Invite her over and spend a few days enjoying the heated, indoor pool. Just, you know, don’t let her visit the garage.”

Timofey looks over at us. “That’s not a bad idea. This place is fucking huge, and she could use a break. I bet we won’t even be able to hear these bastards scream from the third floor.”

“Just make sure whoever you get to replace you knows what I expect,” I tell him.

“Of course.”

He pulls out his phone, already texting Mila to let her know. I'm not worried about Timofey failing to do his job. He's one of our top men, and if he says it'll be done, then it'll be done. I pull my own phone out and send a text to Alina.

Everything okay, baby?

When I don't immediately get an answer, I try not to panic. When she doesn't answer the next text I send, my heart rate starts to speed up. I know it's irrational to panic about a text that isn't quickly answered. There could be several reasons why she's not answering, but the rational part of my brain doesn't ever seem to work where Alina is concerned, so I quickly send a text to Roman.

Is Alina okay? She's not answering my texts.

I let out the breath I've been holding when I see him typing out a response.

She's fine, brother, just fell asleep during the movie. I can't say I blame her. It was so fucking boring.

He sends me a photo of her beautiful, sleeping face, and the sight of her instantly calms me.

Thanks for letting me know. I'm leaving now.

Drive fast. I think Simona is already picking out the next musical. Save me, brother.

I laugh while I promise him I'll speed the whole way back. I look over at Danil. "Roman needs rescuing. They're making him watch musicals, and your wife is about to pick another."

Danil smiles. "That's my girl. I think we should all drive really slow."

"That's cruel, man," Lev tells him.

"They need to get the shitty movies out of their system while we aren't there," Vitaly says. "Better one of us gets stuck watching them than all of us."

"That's true. I've changed my mind. We should all drive well below the speed limit," Lev says.

I laugh. "Go for it, but I'm speeding back. Alina fell asleep, and I don't want her to wake up before I get back, even if that means I get stuck watching a goddamn musical."

Vitaly gives me a smirk. "Have fun."

Leaving the garage, I grab my jacket from the kitchen and nod at the men still on guard duty. A bitterly cold wind hits my face as soon as I open

the door. Turning the collar of my jacket up, I head to my car, tossing my knife in the glove box before heading down the driveway. It takes several minutes for the heat to warm up, and when I'm almost halfway home, it starts to snow. By the time I pull into the underground garage, there are a few inches on the ground, and I'm already wishing for summer.

Our men are still waiting in the parked SUV by the elevator, and when I walk by, I give them a quick wave and tell them they can leave. Excited to see Alina, I take the short ride up to the penthouse. It isn't until the doors open that I hear Roman yelling.

"Alina! It's okay. It's me. It's your brother. You're safe."

His panicked voice is the only one I hear, but that's only because I know Alina is trapped in her silent screams, unable to find her own voice through the terror of her nightmare. I race through the kitchen, yelling her name until I reach the bedroom. Emily, Jolene, Katya, and Simona are trying their best to comfort a pale, shaking Alina while Roman cups her face, forcing her to look at him, to see *him* and know that she's safe.

"Alina." Her eyes turn at the sound of my voice, and I'm by her side right as her eyes fill with tears and her face heats up with shame. "It's okay, baby." I scoop her into my arms and kiss her forehead.

"She just woke up screaming, but no sound was coming out," Roman says, giving his sister a worried look.

"She'll be okay." I pull my eyes from Alina to meet his. "It's just a nightmare."

He scrubs a hand over his face, thinking the exact thing I thought when I first saw her silent screams—how much do you have to beat and terrify a person to condition them to do that? Unfortunately, we both know enough to imagine the answer to that question.

"I'm taking her back to my room. Thanks for watching over her."

"Of course." He steps closer and kisses his sister's head. "I'm here if you need me."

She nods, but she's still too embarrassed to look at him. Wrapping her arms around my neck, she buries her face against me as I walk her out of the room. I'm not sure how I'm going to deal with the Lebedev brothers, but this is the last fucking time I'm leaving her. She'll never wake up scared without me again.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 9

Alina

Humiliation runs through me as Matvey carries me back to our room. My cheeks burn with the memory of waking up to everyone staring down at me with worried, terrified faces. One minute I'd been watching a movie and having a good time with my family, and the next I'd been back in that room with Konstantin, forced beneath him as he thrust into me.

Remembering the breathing techniques Dr. Taylor's been teaching me, I steady my breath, counting out a slow inhale before holding it and then counting out a slow exhale.

"That's right, *malishka*. Just keep breathing. Nice and slow."

After several more breaths, I whisper, "How am I going to be able to face them again?"

Matvey doesn't even have to think about the answer. "They love you and care about you. All they are is worried. No one is mad or irritated, and no one will ever think anything bad about you having a nightmare."

He carries me into our room, sitting down in the rocking chair with me securely in his lap. Cupping my cheek, he looks me over, making sure I'm okay.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here. I promise it'll be the last time you ever wake up without me."

"Matvey," I start to say, but he cuts me off.

"I'm serious. I won't ever make you go through that without me again."

"That's no kind of life for you."

"It's the only life I want."

I see the stubborn look in his dark eyes and know there's no use arguing, so I don't. Reaching a hand up, I run my fingers along his cheek, feeling the rough stubble beneath my skin. His eyes briefly close as he leans into my touch, and when his lips part as he sucks in a breath, all I can think about is how badly I want to kiss him, how badly I *need* to kiss him. I want him to erase the memories in my head. I want to remember how good it feels to be loved by him.

"Matvey," I whisper, bringing my other hand up so I'm cupping his face as I pull him closer. "Kiss me."

His dark eyes search mine, and as much as I know he wants this, he still hesitates and asks, "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

As soon as I whisper the word, he closes the distance, but it's not the searing, hard kisses that I remember from two years ago. Threading his hand through my hair, he cradles the back of my head and lightly brushes his lips against mine, sending a soft rush of pleasure through every part of me. Instead of the selfish, rough touch of a man who only knows how to take, Matvey slows things down, savoring every second of this as he lightly runs his tongue over my top lip before giving it a soft suck that pulls a moan from deep within me.

"I love you," he whispers against my lips before running his tongue along the seam, gently parting them but not delving inside. He sucks and licks and nibbles on every inch of my mouth until I open up for him, wanting and needing more.

With a groan, he slides in, running his tongue along mine as his other hand rests against my cheek, gently stroking my skin with the rough, scarred pad of his thumb. It's a constant reminder of who I'm kissing, and it anchors me to the here and now. I've missed this so goddamn much. The taste of him fills my mouth, and when I open wider, he lets out another masculine groan and deepens the kiss.

Running a hand through his dark hair, I pull him even closer. The hard length of him presses against my ass, the movement throwing me into a memory that I don't fucking want. The strong smell of sandalwood hits me like a smack to the face, replacing Matvey's familiar scent. I try to capture the citrusy scent or the faint whiff of cedar that always lies beneath it, anything to bring me back to him, but all I can smell is fucking sandalwood. I let out a frustrated, angry groan, and Matvey immediately pulls back.

“Are you okay?” His pupils are blown, making his eyes appear blacker than usual, his lips are parted, and his breathing is heavier. He looks so goddamn beautiful, and all I want is him, and even though he’s right here in front of me, I can’t do it.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper in a shaky voice. “I’m so sorry.”

“*Malishka.*” Resting his forehead against mine, his thumb continues to stroke my cheek. “No apologies,” he gently reminds me.

“I want him out of my head.”

“I know, baby. I wish I could take it all from you.”

“I want to be with you without memories of him creeping in. I want to be able to fall asleep watching a movie and not scare the hell out of everybody when I have a nightmare. I just want to be normal, Matvey. I want what we had.”

“We’re going to get it back, Alina. I promise. It may not be exactly how it was, but we’ll get it back, and it’ll be even stronger than before because of everything we’ve gone through.”

He cups my face so damn gently and gives me another soft kiss. “I want him out of your head, too, baby. I don’t ever want you to have to think about him again, and it kills me that I can’t take it away from you and make this better. I want all your pain and fear. I want to take it all from you and keep it for myself, because you shouldn’t ever feel anything except safe and loved.”

Closing his eyes, he sighs and rests his forehead against mine. “No matter how much I hurt him, I can’t change what he’s done to you.”

“None of this is your fault, Matvey. I know you think it is because you were late that day, but it isn’t, and I never once blamed you.”

I feel his head nod next to mine, but I know that no matter what I say, he will always blame himself for this. He holds me for several more minutes before he insists I eat some supper. After we’re done, I go to take a shower. Giving my hair a quick towel dry, I step out to an empty bedroom. Leaving the room, I follow the sounds of laughter and find Matvey and Lev playing a game of pool. The others are scattered around the room. Jolene, Vitaly, and Katya are watching the pool game while the others are lounging on the couch, trying to decide which video game to play. None of them act even the slightest bit put out about the nightmare I’d had, and it instantly makes me feel better.

“You can’t win every goddamn game,” Lev says. “Your streak has to end at some point.”

The corner of Matvey’s mouth lifts up right before he sends another ball into the corner pocket. When he looks up and sees me in the doorway, his whole face lights up in a smile before he gives me a wink and curls his finger at me, beckoning me closer. I return his smile, unable to stop it even if I wanted to. I never could resist him. No matter how hard I tried to play it cool, one look from him was all it took to have me grinning like a lovestruck idiot. The amused glint in his dark eyes lets me know that I’m hiding it now as well as I did back then. As soon as I’m close enough, he grabs my waist and pulls me in for a hug. Dragging his nose along my hair, he breathes me in with a sigh.

“You always smell so damn good.”

“Soap will do that to a person,” I tease.

I feel him smile against the shell of my ear. “No, *malishka*, it’s just you.” He gives my earlobe a soft suck, making goosebumps rise along my skin. “Want to help me kick their asses?”

“I’m terrible at pool,” I remind him in case he’s forgotten.

“I know, baby, but I’m not.”

He gives a soft laugh and wraps an arm around my lower back, keeping me snug against him as he lifts his head. “We’re playing teams. Maybe your wives can redeem you.”

Vitaly winks at Katya. “Well if anyone can, it’s her.”

Matvey hands me a cue stick while Lev racks the balls and gets it all set up. We play against Lev and Jolene for the first game, and it’s a testament to how good Matvey is that we still manage to win because most of my shots do absolutely nothing except push the ball a little further down the table.

After another terrible attempt during our game with Vitaly and Katya, Matvey gives a soft laugh and comes up behind me, wrapping his body around mine so he can help guide my hands. “*Malishka*, you play just as badly as you did when you were younger.”

“Remember when I tried to get you to teach me when I was seventeen?”

He groans and lets out a soft laugh. “Vividly, baby.”

I smile at the memory. I may have used every possible excuse I could think of to get our bodies as close as possible. He’d been a perfect gentleman, though, despite all my attempts to get him to stop.

“I remember that night,” Vitaly says, laughing. “That’s the only time I ever saw Matvey fuck up so many shots.” He turns his head to wink at his wife. “I almost beat him that night.”

“The one and only time,” Matvey reminds him.

Vitaly smiles. “I told you. The sticks are too thin. I’m used to something with more girth.”

Even with Matvey’s hands still guiding mine, I’m laughing too hard to make it a good shot, and the ball rolls uselessly across the table, barely nudging the solid red ball I was aiming for.

“Sorry,” I say around another laugh.

Matvey kisses my cheek. “No worries, baby. We’re still going to win.”

And thanks to him, we do. By the time the game is over, Emily is asleep with her head resting on Roman’s lap, Simona and Danil have already called it a night, and Lev is whispering something in his wife’s ear that has her blushing a deep red before she laughs and pulls him out of the room.

I watch them disappear, happy for them even as a stab of jealousy hits me. I wish I could grab Matvey’s hand and lead him upstairs, not a care in the world except whether or not we’d actually make it to the bed before he bends me over and slides into me. The longing that shoots through me is almost a physical pain, and when I feel Matvey’s arms wrap around me, I lean into his touch, needing the comfort.

“I hate to see you looking so sad, *malishka*. It breaks my heart.”

“I’m fine.” I force a smile and meet his dark eyes, but he sees right through it.

“You don’t ever need to lie to me. Tell me you’re sad, tell me you feel like shit and don’t want to get out of bed, tell me to go to hell because you’re sick of me suffocating you, but please don’t ever lie to me.”

“I could never get sick of you, Matvey.” I watch my brother pick up his sleeping, pregnant wife, scowling at him when I think about his still-healing wound. He smiles as he walks by.

“I’m fine. Stop worrying.”

“I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to be doing that with your stitches,” I remind him.

He laughs and keeps walking. They’re all just as stubborn as I remember them being. Proving my point, when we’re alone and I turn back to meet Matvey’s eyes, he’s waiting for me to finish telling him why I’d looked so sad.

“I’m fine.”

When he raises a dark brow at me, I sigh and add, “I just got a little jealous because I wish I could grab your hand and pull you to bed.”

“Why can’t you?”

“You know why.”

His face softens at my words. “That’s not what I mean. If you want to take me to bed, take me to bed. If all we do is hold each other and fall asleep, then that’s all we do.” He smiles and gives me a quick kiss. “I’ll still love it.”

“You’re too good for me.”

He shakes his head at my words. “I’ll never be good enough.” Lowering his head so our lips are almost touching, he whispers, “But you can still take me to bed, *malishka*.”

The heat of his breath against my lips has my own parting. My fingers clutch his shirt, gripping tightly as I close the distance and kiss him. He swallows my groan when his tongue runs along mine. His hand cups the back of my head, gently fisting my hair, and when both his hands drop to my waist so he can pick me up and set me on the pool table, I moan his name against his lips. When I spread my knees, he stands between them. I feel the hard length of him against me, but when memories threaten to overtake me, I start to pull back.

“Easy, baby,” he whispers against my lips. His hands cup my cheeks. “It’s me.” His scarred thumb traces a path along my skin. “It’s just me.”

I nod and let out a shaky breath. “I know it’s you. I’m okay now.”

He waits, making sure I really am okay before he gently kisses me again. My hands run through his hair, pulling him closer, and when I start to hear Konstantin’s voice in my ear and smell the first hint of sandalwood, I force myself to ignore it. I won’t let him steal this moment from me. I’m determined to see this through.

Tightening my legs around Matvey, I give his tongue a hard suck before pulling back to say, “Take me to bed.”

I know he wants this as badly as I do, so when I give his bottom lip another soft suck, he groans and slides his hands under my ass, lifting me up with ease. He carries me down the hall to our room, kicking the door shut behind him before quickly closing the distance to the bed. My legs stay locked around him when he lowers me to the bed, and when I’m laying against the mattress, I rock my hips, stunned by how good it feels. It’s been

so long since I've felt anything good between my legs. It's been nothing but pain and suffering, and I want so badly to feel something good and erase all the bad.

"Alina."

His raspy voice is a question and a plea and a declaration all at once, and when I grip the bottom of his shirt and start to pull it up, he lets me, understanding that this is my answer.

"Fuck, baby," he growls, sliding a hand up my shirt so he can cup one of my breasts. His thumb grazes my lace-covered nipple, forcing me to arch off the bed. My fingers run over his scarred back, savoring the feel of him beneath my hands once more.

Such a good fucking pet.

The words fill my head, but I squeeze my eyes shut, forcing my focus back to Matvey, the man I love, the man who's kissing me and holding me so damn sweetly.

All you'll ever be good for is a fuck, so that's what I'm going to use you for. Every part of you will be mine. I'm going to ruin every goddamn hole you have, and you're going to cry so fucking sweetly for me while I do it, aren't you, pet?

The pained groan escapes before I can stop it, and Matvey immediately freezes. When he starts to pull back, I dig my fingers into his back. "No, please, don't stop."

"Alina," he starts to say, but I cut him off with a kiss. I put everything I have into it, kissing him hard as I try to fight my way through the memories that are pressing down on me and making me feel like I can't breathe. It takes me several seconds to realize he's not kissing me back.

"Please," I beg. "I can do this. I know I can."

"*Malishka*." The sadness in his voice feels like a bucket of cold water being thrown on me, and when I start to cry, he turns on his side and pulls me against him, spooning me with his body so I'm completely cocooned. But no matter how protected I may be, it doesn't stop the memories, it doesn't stop the voice in my head, and it doesn't take the pain from my chest. I just wanted this moment with him. I wanted to push through, because I thought that maybe if we had sex, then it might push away the memories of Konstantin, but I'd been an idiot to think it would be so simple.

“Shh, it’s okay, baby,” Matvey whispers in my ear, kissing me and stroking my hair as his other arm keeps me in a tight hug.

I don’t bother telling him that it will never be okay. Instead I cry myself to sleep, waking up several minutes or a few hours later to an empty bed.

“Matvey?”

My eyes search the dark room before my fuzzy brain registers the sound of the shower and the dim light coming from beneath the closed bathroom door. With a groan, I lay back against the bed, reliving the memory of what happened. Knowing I won’t be able to fall back asleep, I turn on the bedside light and sit up. Trying to find the book we’ve been reading, I search the bedside, but the book Matvey’s been reading to me isn’t there. Shoving the covers off, I force myself to leave the cozy warmth in search of something to read.

The bookshelf in the corner is full of my old books, and when I start digging around, I see he’s added several more since I’ve been gone. My breath catches in my throat when I realize he’s added on to my favorite series because the newest books must’ve been published after I was taken. Reaching for the closest one, I open it and see the message written inside.

Alina,

I know how much you love this series. I’m sorry you couldn’t read it the day it was published, but it’s here waiting for you, just like I am.

All my love,

Matvey

I flip through a few more, reading the sweet inscriptions, feeling so much love but also so much pain when I think about what we both went through. I’m about to pick one and take it to bed when I see another book wedged in the corner, pushed back and hidden from view unless you’re squatting down and staring at it straight-on like I am right now. The spine is a plain black, no title or author to give it away, and when I pull it out, I see it’s not a book at all; it’s a sketchpad. Matvey is a man of many talents, but he’s not an artist, and he’s never showed any interest in learning to draw, so with curious fingers, I open it up. The last thing I’m expecting is to see my face staring back at me. I’m naked and on all fours, the end of my leash held in Konstantin’s hand as he looks down at me with a disgusted look on his face.

“What?”

My whispered question dies on my tongue as my knees buckle and I crumple to the floor. I flip through the pages, each one more graphic and brutal than the last, and when I see the drawings of Vitaly, I realize this must be Katya's sketchpad. She's the only one who would be able to draw these things, because she's the only one who saw them, and by the time I hear the bathroom door open, I feel like I'm going to be sick.

"Alina?"

Matvey's worried voice feels very far away, and when he squats down next to me in nothing but a pair of black sweats, I barely register the sight of him. My eyes run over him, and it's the first time I've seen him bare chested since I've been back. When I see the new tattoos, I'm still too stunned to even comment on the sight of my name written over his heart. All I can think about are the drawings in my hand, the drawings that he's seen.

"I'm sorry, baby. I didn't want you to find those, but I couldn't bring myself to give them back. It felt too personal for anyone else to have."

"They're Katya's?"

"They are. She has nightmares, too, and drawing helps her get them out of her head."

He cups my face, gently wiping away the tears I hadn't even realized I was crying.

Matvey looks at the sketchpad I'm still holding. "It's how we found you. Katya was drawing one of these after a nightmare, and Vitaly just happened to wake up and see it."

My heart drops at his words. "Vitaly saw these?"

The pain in Matvey's eyes and the flash of guilt warns me that there's more to this than I realize. Shame floods through me when I think of Matvey looking at these images, but to know that Vitaly also saw me like this is just too damn much.

I force myself to ask, "Who else saw them?"

When he hesitates, I grip his wrist. "Please tell me."

He sighs and drops his eyes for a second before facing me again. "Everyone."

"Oh my god," I whisper, thinking about how we were all together just a few hours ago, playing pool and laughing, and every single one of them saw me like this. They saw me naked and abused and on full fucking display because Katya didn't shy away from details. Her nightmares were vivid,

and she captured every damn bit of it in an effort to purge them from her mind. The trouble is her purging has had the opposite effect for me. It hasn't expelled my demons from my mind; it's exposed them to everyone I know and love. My most vulnerable, horrific moments spread out for all to see.

"My brother saw me like this?" I whisper the question, but I already know the answer. My face heats with shame and embarrassment and when I close the book and toss it aside, Matvey doesn't stop me.

"I'm so sorry."

I let go of his arm and stand, not sure where I'm going or what I should do, but knowing I desperately need a few minutes to myself.

"Alina, please," he starts to say when I take a few steps from him, but I cut him off.

"Please, Matvey, I just need a few minutes."

He nods, hands by his sides and clenched into fists in an effort to keep himself in check. Giving me what I want goes against every instinct he has, but he does it as I walk past and disappear into the bathroom, shutting and locking the door behind me.

Gripping the edge of the counter, I face my reflection, hating the person I see staring back at me. It's the same face from those damn drawings, the same body that was forced to do unspeakable things with a man I despise, and the same mind that can't break free of him. The dark ink of my tattoo catches my attention, and when I look down at the black viper circled around my wrist, it's his goddamn voice I hear, taunting me as the memories come crashing down.

"This tattoo means I own you, pet. It means you're mine, it means you'll always be mine, and there's not a fucking thing you can do about it. You are nothing but my plaything, and when I tire of you, I'm going to kill you and get another. Your life is meaningless apart from the pleasure you bring me. Remember that every time you look at your wrist. Let the snake remind you of the truth."

He'd circled his hand around my wrist, gripping the still-tender flesh until I'd winced.

"This tattoo is as good as a collar around your neck," he'd hissed in my ear. "Maybe I should have him add my name, hmm? A nice message of 'If found please return to…' What do you think, pet?"

With a gasp, I pull myself from the memory, knowing what I need to do. I open the drawers, pawing through the contents of each one until I find

what I’m looking for. Dangerous men are never too far from a weapon, so I’m not at all surprised when I see a knife tucked into the back of one drawer. Pushing past the cotton balls and Q-tips, I wrap my fingers around the grey metal, pulling the knife out and flicking it open with the push of a button. The blade slides out, sharp and lethal, and this time when I face my reflection, I’m smiling.

I’m never going to look down at my wrist and see that fucking tattoo again. Bringing the blade to my skin, I grit my teeth and press down. The knife is razor sharp, slipping into my skin with very little effort. It takes my body a second to catch up. I see the skin part, watch the vibrant splash of red as it fills the cut and spills over, and only then does the pain hit. Even with my teeth clenched tightly together, I can’t stop the pained moan from escaping.

“Alina!”

“I’m fine,” I quickly say, but my words are shaky, and when I make another cut, severing the black snake, he starts pounding on the door.

“Let me in, baby!”

I ignore him, desperate to get this thing off me. I try not to cut too deeply, but with all the blood it’s impossible to tell. The pain consumes me, but I’ve dealt with pain before, and I know how to shove it aside. I’m more worried about Matvey stopping me before I can finish. The door shakes in the frame when he hits it again, and I know he’s going to break through it any second. I have no idea how to skin a tattoo off, so all I can do is slice at it and hope like hell I’m at least damaging it enough to make it impossible to tell what it is. I’d rather have a wrist of mangled scar tissue than that fucking tattoo. At least I’ll know that I gave it to myself. When I hear the loud bang of the door splintering open, I give one last cut, but as soon as I do it, I realize my mistake. The blade sinks into my inner wrist, cutting too deeply and sending a cascade of blood down my hand and onto the floor.

“No!” Matvey’s terrified yell fills the bathroom as he runs to me, catching me right as my knees give out and I start to fall.

“Baby, no,” he cries, gripping my wrist tightly to stop the blood while his other arm wraps around me, cradling me against him.

“I’m sorry,” I cry. “I didn’t mean to.”

“What’s going on? Are you okay?”

Danil’s voice is panicked as he rushes in, and when he sees me in Matvey’s arms and the blood that’s quickly covering the two of us, he

hisses out a curse and grabs his phone before rushing back out of the room.

Matvey's dark eyes search mine, and the pain in his hurts far worse than the damage I just did to myself.

"I will never be without you again, *malishka*," he whispers, pressing his forehead against mine. "If you go, I go."

"Matvey," I start to say, but his forehead slowly rolls against mine with the soft shake of his head. "Don't bother arguing with me. There's no changing my mind. Your last breath will be my last breath. My heart stops with yours."

I try to tell him that I didn't mean to cut so deeply, that killing myself was never my intention, but he's already lifting me up and carrying me out of the bathroom as everything starts to grow fuzzy. I fade in and out, barely remembering the frantic shouts of my family before a quick elevator ride and then the sound of an engine revving and the sharp squeal of tires on concrete. Matvey holds me tightly against him, squeezing my wrist the whole way, not caring that he's still bare chested, even though it's snowing outside. Somehow through all the chaos, one of them thought to grab a blanket, because right after we leave the parking garage, I feel the warmth of it against my skin. I recognize the tattooed hands as they tuck it in around me.

"Thanks, Lev," I whisper.

He pats my head in a comforting move that he's been doing since I was little. "Just rest," he tells me. "We're taking you to Dominic's. Dr. Bianchi's waiting."

I sigh against Matvey's chest, feeling a wave of guilt hit me. I never meant for this to happen. I didn't want to worry everyone, and I sure as hell didn't plan for everyone to think I was trying to kill myself. I just wanted his mark off my skin.

"I'm sorry," I whisper against Matvey's chest.

He kisses my forehead and whispers back, "No apologies, baby. We'll talk about this later. You just need to relax and try not to worry. We're going to fix this."

I drift in and out on the drive to Dominic's, only fully waking back up when the car stops and Matvey gets out, still holding me tightly. The door opens as soon as we reach the top step, and when I look over, I see Dominic in another one of his impeccable suits, waiting for us.

He takes one look at me and says, “Follow me,” leading the way to the same room my brother was in not that long ago. Dr. Bianchi is ready and waiting. Pointing to the hospital bed, he tells Matvey to set me down. As soon as I feel the mattress beneath me, I reach up with my good hand and clutch his arm, not wanting him to leave.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he assures me, still keeping a tight grip on my injured wrist. I let go, shocked when he stands up and I see what I’ve done to him. His bare chest and stomach are covered in blood. Streaks of it decorate his skin, hiding some of his tattoos, but I can still read my name through the red smear over his heart.

“My name,” I whisper. “When did you do that?”

He’s too busy yelling at Dr. Bianchi to do something to hear me, and I’m too tired to repeat the question. Pain slices up my arm when Matvey lets go of my wrist so the doctor can see what I’ve done. His light brown eyes meet mine as he says something in Italian, but there’s no judgment in them, just a flash of sadness that’s quickly hidden before he’s wrapping my wrist up to stop the bleeding and then getting a syringe.

“What is that?” Matvey asks, stepping in between us and making it clear that the large needle isn’t coming anywhere near me until he knows exactly what’s in it.

“It’s something to knock her out for a bit.” When Matvey still doesn’t budge, he adds, “Her wrist is cut badly, and she’s going to need a lot of stitches to fix it. Do you want her to be awake for that?”

“She has nightmares.” Matvey says, keeping my hand in his. “What if she has one and can’t wake up?”

Dr. Bianchi looks over at me and gives me a reassuring smile. “It’s a light sedative, Alina. It’s just enough to put you out so I can get you fixed up. Okay?”

“Okay,” I whisper, squeezing one of Matvey’s fingers to let him know it really is okay.

Matvey relents and steps aside so Dr. Bianchi can give me the shot, but he still stays right next to the bed with his hand gripping mine as my other one lays wrapped up and throbbing so badly it’s making it hard to think.

Dr. Bianchi inserts the needle, but I barely feel it on top of the other pain. He looks up at the wall of bloody muscle next to my bed. “You should go wait in the other room.”

“That’s not going to happen. I’m not leaving her side.”

The stubborn glint in Matvey’s dark eyes is the last thing I remember before everything fades away.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 10

Matvey

My heart speeds up when Alina's eyes close, the fear threatening to take over, but I force it away, reminding myself that she's safe, that it's just a sedative and that she'll be fine. I keep her uninjured hand in mine, stroking her soft skin as the doctor unravels the bandage he'd put on her to stop the bleeding. Seeing what she's done to herself, the raw, bloody skin that's shredded like she was trying to skin herself, sends another rush of fear and pain through me.

"What does this tattoo mean?" Dr. Bianchi asks while he gently starts to clean the wounds. "I noticed it on her when I examined her, but I'm not familiar with it."

"It's a black viper ouroboros. It means she was trafficked and privately owned. It was a sign that she belonged to Konstantin."

He nods but doesn't say anything for several minutes as he looks at her wrist. It's only after he starts on the stitches that he says, "She wasn't trying to kill herself."

"Are you sure?" My fear was that killing herself was exactly what she'd been trying to do, and knowing how close I almost came to losing her again is something I can't even let myself think about right now.

"She was trying to cut the tattoo off." He raises his eyes to mine, peering at me over the rim of his glasses. "It's not an easy thing to do. Most people would have stopped after the first cut. The pain must've been enormous. She hated this thing," he says, motioning toward the disfigured tattoo, "more than she cared about the pain."

When he starts stitching up the deepest cut, his eyes quickly flick to me. He sees the burn scars that cover my arms, the way they disappear around

to my back and the tattoos that cover them.

“Looks like you’re no stranger to pain yourself. Those scars look old.”

He goes back to work when I say, “I was fifteen.”

When I don’t elaborate, his lip curls up in a smile. “Tattooing over them must’ve been excruciating.”

“I didn’t give a fuck about the pain. I didn’t want them, but I was stuck with them, so I decided to make them mine.”

He lifts a brow at me, and without another word he ties off another stitch.

“You a fucking doctor of psychology, too?”

He gives a soft laugh and gently sinks the needle back into Alina’s skin. The sight of it makes me queasy in a way that torturing men never has.

“No, I’ve just learned a lot in my unique profession.”

“Sewing up bad guys?”

He surprises me by gently squeezing Alina’s hand as he holds it steady. “You know as well as I do that things are rarely black and white, and I’m not sewing up a bad guy now. I’m helping a woman who’s seen more pain than any one person should ever have to face.”

“If I have anything to say about it, she won’t ever experience pain again.”

He’s quiet when he gets to the more difficult cut on her inner wrist, and after several tense minutes where I hardly breathe, he sighs and says, “She’s very lucky she didn’t cut any deeper.”

Eyeing his work, he checks everything until he’s satisfied and then starts covering it all in an antibiotic ointment. Alina’s wrist is swollen, red, and covered in lines of black stitches. The viper tattoo that was once there has been so badly disfigured that it’s unrecognizable, which I guess was her goal all along. I brush a strand of her dark hair off her face and kiss her cheek while the doctor bandages her wrist.

“I love you, baby,” I whisper in her ear, hoping she can hear me.

When her wrist is wrapped, he walks to a cabinet and comes back with a bottle of pills. He hands them to me. “For the pain, and she needs to baby that wrist while it heals. Keep it wrapped up, check for infection daily, and don’t get it wet for a few days.”

“I’ll take care of everything.”

“How’s her eating? She’s still too thin.”

“She’s doing better.” I run my thumb over the back of her uninjured hand before resting it on the smooth skin of her inner wrist, needing to feel her pulse beneath my fingers. “Eating is hard for her, but we’ve found a way that works.”

He doesn’t press for details, and when he starts to gather up his supplies, I can’t help but ask, “How did you start working for the Alessi family?”

Tossing the bloody bandages in the garbage, he says, “I lived in an area of Italy that was run by the Milano family. I was very young at the time, but I’d already earned a reputation as a good doctor and been given a position at the best hospital in the city. My wife—” he cuts himself off and the pained look that comes to his eyes has me holding up a hand.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked.” I hate questions about myself, and I usually never ask them of others, but it’s unusual to meet someone in this line of work who seems like a genuinely kind person, and I can’t help but be curious as to how Dr. Bianchi came to work for a family whose hands are constantly covered in the blood of others.

“It’s okay,” he says, scrubbing a hand over his jaw. “My wife was walking home from the market when she was hit by a car. The driver didn’t even stop to see if she was okay, but everyone knew who it was. Dante Milano, the son of Don Milano, drove a very unique car, and there were several witnesses who saw the vintage Ferrari hit my wife. No one would say anything, of course, and I knew that the man would never pay for his crime.” His brown eyes meet mine. “He took everything from me, and I knew he’d never suffer for it. I doubt he even gave my wife a second thought after he ran her over.

“The police tried to tell me she died quickly.” He gives a harsh laugh. “I saw the report, though, and I know exactly how much she suffered as she lay on the hard street, choking on her own blood. I wanted to kill Dante, but it was impossible. He was too protected. Hell, his family owned the entire police force. There was nothing I could do, and it was driving me crazy. I’m guessing you know what that feels like.”

“I do.”

“And you know what it feels like to want revenge so badly you’d sell your fucking soul for it?”

I meet his dark eyes and feel Alina’s steady pulse beneath my fingers. “I do.”

“Then you’ll understand when I say I went to Antonio Alessi, the rival mafia family, and begged him for his help. I promised to work for him for the rest of my life if he could get me the revenge I needed.”

He gives a small shrug. “He agreed, and I’ve been with them ever since.”

“Do you regret it?”

The smile he gives me is as cold as any I’ve seen on hardened criminals. “Never. Antonio didn’t kill him for me. He tied him up and gave him to me, and I made sure his death was slow and painful.” Pulling himself from the memory, he adds, “After that Antonio and his men ended the Milano family and took over. I’m not blind to what the Alessi family does, but Antonio is a fair man, and when Dominic takes over, I’ll be proud to call that man my boss. Even as a child, he was whip-smart and fearless.”

“He’s a good man,” I agree.

“I don’t suppose I can convince you to step away long enough for a shower.”

“I’m not leaving her.”

He sighs, but I can tell he’s not surprised at my answer. He motions towards the sink in the corner and grabs a towel before handing it to me. “At least use the sink to scrub off her dried blood. She doesn’t need to see that when she wakes up.”

I look down at my chest, knowing he’s right, but I still hesitate to release my hand from hers.

“She’s going to be asleep for a few hours,” he reminds me. “And the sink is five feet away.”

I look up at him, letting him know with my look that I’m not amused, but he’s no longer wary of me and my brothers, so all I get is a half-smile and a soft laugh. Giving Alina another kiss on the forehead, I walk to the sink and start to clean. The door opens when I’m toweling off and Dominic and Lev walk in.

“How is she?” Lev stands next to Alina’s sleeping form. His eyes roam over her, stopping on her bandaged wrist. “Fuck,” he whispers, the pain making his voice softer than usual.

I walk back over to her, taking her uninjured hand again before kissing it and sitting on the edge of the bed so I can be close to her.

“She’s going to be fine,” Dr. Bianchi says, answering for me.

“Everyone’s been texting me nonstop, wanting to know how she is.” Lev rests his hand on her head for just a second, brushing back a strand of hair. “What happened?”

I sigh as guilt hits me hard, knowing this is my fault. “She found the sketchpad.”

“Goddammit,” he mutters.

“I know. I hid it, but I should’ve burnt the damn thing. She found it while I was in the shower. She was embarrassed and hurt and knowing that everyone else saw it was too damn much for her. She locked herself in the bathroom and tried to cut her tattoo off.”

“What?” His eyes lock on her bandaged wrist. “She wasn’t trying to kill herself?”

“No. She wants to be free of him, Lev, but she can’t get him out of her head, and the tattoo was a constant reminder that she decided she couldn’t face any longer.” I let out another heavy sigh. “I should’ve taken her to a tattoo artist. He could’ve covered it, or we could’ve had it removed. This is all my fault.”

My brothers know how much I hate to be touched, so they’re always careful to avoid it, but Lev grips my shoulder, giving me no choice but to look at him.

“It’s not your fault. There’s no way in hell you could’ve known she’d do something like this to herself.”

“It’s my responsibility to know,” I tell him. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but if this were Jolene, you’d be thinking the same damn thing I am.”

He knows I’m right, so he just grimaces and pulls his hand back. Dominic and Dr. Bianchi are whispering quietly in Italian, having no clue what we’ve been saying since we’ve been speaking Russian, but when the room grows quiet, Dominic raises a brow at me.

“Everything okay?”

Lev sends a quick text to the others while I answer him.

“Yeah, thanks, Dominic.” I scrub a hand over the back of my neck, unsure of what to say. I don’t like being in debt to any man, but his doctor has helped Alina twice now, and her life means way more to me than my pride.

“I told you we’re even,” he says, knowing exactly what I’m thinking. “You helped me find my sister’s killer. We’re even, Matvey, no matter how

many times my doctor stitches up someone you care about.”

I nod, knowing I’d feel the same way if the situation were reversed but hating it all the same. “Can I take her home?” When the doctor hesitates, I say, “I’ll watch over her. She won’t be alone for a second, and I’ll make sure the wound stays clean.”

“Let me know immediately if you see any signs of infection—fever, swelling or pus or if it starts bleeding again.”

“I know, Doc, don’t worry.” I give a soft laugh. “I’m pretty familiar with stitches.”

“He is,” Lev agrees. “He’s stitched me up plenty of times.”

Dr. Bianchi relents and gives me the okay to take Alina home, but only after I promise to send him a photo in a day or two so he can see how it’s healing.

Before I pick her up, I hold out my hand to shake his. “Thanks for taking care of her, Doc.”

“I’m happy to help Alina anytime she needs it.”

Nodding my thanks once more, I reach down and carefully pick her up while Lev grabs the painkillers for me. She’s limp in my arms, but I can feel the heat of her breath against my neck, letting me know she’s okay. We follow Dominic back through his house, and when he opens the front door for us, Lev helps me tuck the blanket back around Alina before we step out into the cold.

“You want a shirt or a jacket?” Dominic asks me, but I just shake my head, not even feeling the brisk temperature or the snow that’s still falling.

“I’m fine,” I tell him.

“Fucking Russians,” he mutters, making Lev and I smile as he shuts the door on us.

Getting in the backseat, I keep Alina in my lap during the drive. Her small body molds to mine as her scent fills my nose. Every breath calms me a little more than the last, and when Lev pulls into the parking garage, I have a plan in place and I’m starting to feel somewhat sane again.

Everyone’s waiting for us as soon as we get off the elevator, but as well-meaning as they all are, I’m fucking mentally exhausted and just want to be alone with Alina. Seeing my face, Roman kisses his sister’s head and then guides his wife back to bed, telling me to let him know when Alina wakes up. He looks just as worn out as I feel, and when Vitaly and Danil follow

Roman’s lead, I take Alina back to our room, telling Lev thanks on our way down the stairs.

He smacks my shoulder on the way to his own room. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“I will,” I tell him, and it’s not until I walk into the bedroom that I realize how much I don’t want to face a bloody, destroyed bathroom. Looking over, I brace myself for the sight, but instead of a kicked-in door and blood-splattered tiles, there’s a brand-new door and a spotless counter and floor. Stepping closer, I shake my head. I shouldn’t be surprised that my brothers managed to do all this. They wouldn’t have wanted the reminder of what happened waiting for Alina. She’s family, and we’ve always taken care of what’s ours. Now more than ever.

Walking to the bed, I set Alina down and curl up next to her, too exhausted to do anything except pull the covers over us and tighten my arms around her. The sedative is enough to keep her night terrors away, and for once she gets a full night’s sleep, not waking until well after the sun’s come up. As soon as I feel her stir, I kiss her cheek and tell her everything’s okay.

“Matvey?”

“We’re home, *malishka*. Everything’s fine.”

“What happened?”

“What do you remember?”

She’s quiet for a second before saying, “I found the sketchpad and kind of lost it. I tried to cut the tattoo off and made a giant ass of myself.”

“The sedative must be playing with your memories, baby, because that’s not at all what happened. I was an idiot and left the sketchpad where you could find it, then you saw it and it brought back a ton of memories and embarrassed you. You were upset and scared and angry and you tried to rid yourself of something you hated.” I run a finger lightly beneath her bandage. “You tried to cut him out of you in the only way you could think to do it.”

“I wasn’t trying to kill myself,” she whispers. “I need you to know that. I would never do that to you.”

I run my nose behind her ear, breathing her in. “I’m very glad to hear that, but just so you know, I meant what I said. No matter what, you go, I go.”

“I don’t want you to do that. If something happens to me, I want you to try and be happy without me.”

I let out a harsh laugh. “Impossible, and there’s no talking me out of this. I know what life is like without you, and I won’t go through it again. The only thing that kept me going was the belief that you were still alive. If that had been taken from me, I would’ve put a bullet in my head.”

“Don’t say that.”

The pain in her voice has me kissing her cheek. “You go, I go,” I repeat, because the thought of my heart continuing to beat after hers has stopped is not something I’ll ever accept. There’s no life for me without her. If the past two years have taught me anything, it’s that.

“I love you, Matvey,” she whispers, turning her head so she can kiss the bicep she’s resting on. “Thanks for taking care of me. Dr. Bianchi is probably sick of seeing me.”

“I love you, too, baby, and he’s not. He really likes you. If he weren’t old enough to be your grandpa, I’d be a little jealous.”

She gives a soft laugh and then winces when she holds her hand up to see the bandaged wrist.

“How bad does it hurt? I have some painkillers you can take.”

“It’s sore,” she admits, “but I’ll be fine. I don’t want to take them yet. They’ll just make me sleepy.” Looking across the room, she notices the new door. “Who fixed that?”

“I’m not sure. My guess is Roman called in one of the guys to replace it.”

“Poor guy. He probably thought the life of a criminal would be so exciting, and instead it’s a late night of replacing a bathroom door.”

I laugh and kiss her ear. “It’s not all shooting people and looking badass. The quicker they learn that, the better.”

“You always look badass, though.”

I laugh and roll onto my back, stretching the kinks out. She turns and curls into me, fitting perfectly like she always does. Her fingers run over the tattoo of her name.

“When did you get this?”

“Shortly after you were taken. I had to remind myself why it was important to keep breathing and why my heart had to keep beating, even though it felt like it had been ripped from my chest.”

Her fingers trace over the Russian letters while I run my hand through her hair.

“Promise me something, *malishka*.”

“Anything,” she whispers against my chest.

“If things ever get that bad for you again, promise me you’ll talk to me. Promise me you won’t ever hurt yourself again.” I run a finger along her bandage. “Seeing you bleed does something to me, and I can’t stand to ever see it again.”

She kisses her name on my chest. “I promise I won’t hurt myself again.” She traces a finger along my skin, leaving a trail of goosebumps in her wake, and when I feel myself start to grow hard, I groan and scoot her over a bit so she won’t be bothered by it.

“Sorry, just ignore it.”

“What if I don’t want to ignore it?”

She trails her fingers lower, lightly running them over my abs, and when she gets to the jeans I’m still wearing, I grab her hand to stop her.

“Alina, what are you doing?”

“Why can’t I make you feel good?”

“You already make me feel good.”

She lifts her head, and I can’t help but smile. Her dark hair is messy from sleep, and her blue-green eyes look even more vivid in the sunlight. She’s so goddamn beautiful, and every part of her is so familiar to me. I know her better than anyone, yet she still manages to take my breath away every time I look at her. I run my finger down her cheek, and when she tries to slide her hand in my pants again, I smile and tap the tip of her nose.

Reaching down, I grab her hand, squeezing it gently in mine. “I love it when you touch me, baby, but there’s no way in hell I’m going to lay here and let you jerk me off.”

“Why not?”

Letting out a disbelieving laugh, I lift up onto my forearm and angle my body over hers. Taking her injured arm, I raise a brow at her.

“You’re hurt.”

“I wasn’t going to use that hand,” she starts to argue, but I stop her words with my own.

“You’re in pain, you were hurt badly last night, and you’re doing it out of guilt, and I don’t ever want you to feel like that while you’re touching me.”

“It’s not guilt.” Her beautiful eyes can’t meet mine while she says it, though.

“You feel guilty because I’m hard. You think because I’m aroused you owe it to me or some crazy shit like that, like I have to come or I’m going to be disappointed.” I lean closer and kiss her cheek. “Or maybe you’re afraid that I didn’t mean it when I said I’d wait forever for you.”

“Matvey,” she whispers, letting out another sigh. “I just want to make you feel good. Can’t I at least do that?”

“You always make me feel good, but you don’t know me at all if you think I’m the kind of man who could lay here and let you give me a hand job after everything that’s happened.”

She tries to turn her head from me, embarrassment coloring her cheeks, but I cup her face and force her to look at me. Running my thumb over her flushed skin, I kiss her lips and whisper, “If anyone’s going to be coming, it’s going to be you, but we’re not there yet, *malishka*. First, I want you resting and healing, and then when I’m satisfied you’re ready for the next step, I have an idea.”

Her eyes widen slightly at my words. “What idea?”

I grin and wink at her. “Rest up and find out.”

She laughs and rolls her eyes at me, but for the next three days, I show her exactly how serious I’m taking her recovery. Mandatory naps, painkillers when I think she needs one, and enough calories in her diet to satisfy me. I check her stitches several times a day, making sure there isn’t any sign of infection, and her latest appointment with Dr. Taylor seems to have gone well. She’s still having night terrors, but it’s no longer every night, whether that’s from the strong painkillers or the fact that Konstantin is slowly losing his grip on her, I’m still not sure. I’m hoping it’s the latter, though.

When my phone buzzes with my daily update from Timofey, I grab it and read the quick text while Alina watches me.

Still alive.

That’s all I need to know, so I set the phone aside. Part of me wants to give the order to shoot them and be done with it, but a bigger part of me isn’t quite ready to say goodbye. They haven’t earned death yet. They haven’t suffered enough.

“You can leave if you need to, Matvey.”

I look over at where she's curled up in a chair, reading one of the books from the shelf in the corner.

"There's nowhere else I need to be."

I know I can't stay in the penthouse with her forever. The auction is in a few days, and I can't let my brothers handle that without me, but for now, there's no reason for me to leave and every reason for me to stay.

Standing up, I walk into the closet. The box of presents is still waiting for Alina, so I dig around until I find the two I want. Before I leave, I also grab the full-length mirror that's hanging on the wall. Alina watches me lean the mirror against the bed so it's angled to face exactly where I'd just been sitting. Satisfied, I sit back down, making sure I'm completely in view before motioning her closer.

"What are you doing?"

"Remember I told you I wanted to try something?"

"Of course. I've been bugging you about it for the past three days, but you've been too stubborn to tell me what this idea of yours is."

Laughing, I pull her down into my lap and hand her the two small presents. "First, open these."

Her fingers run over the wrapping paper, the same way she always used to do whenever someone gave her a present. Alina is the funnest person to buy gifts for. Her surprise is always genuine, and she truly loves every damn thing she's ever been given, no matter how much money was spent. She'll never be the kind of woman who demands expensive jewelry or insists on only wearing designer brands. That's just not who she is. She grew up with nothing and has continued to expect nothing, so anything beyond that is met with deep appreciation and surprise.

Dragging a finger along her cheek, I pull her hair back so I can see her better. "You're impossible to spoil, but that's not going to stop me from trying. You deserve everything, Alina, and I'm going to give it to you."

"You don't ever need to buy me anything, Matvey. I hope you know that."

"I do know that, but I *want* to buy you things, *malishka*." I nudge the boxes towards her again. "Buying you things while you were gone helped me, and as soon as I saw these, I knew they were meant for you. No other woman could ever do them justice."

The corner of her mouth lifts in a smile before she carefully starts to open the first box. After several seconds, I laugh. "It's okay to rip the paper,

baby."

"But it's so pretty."

She takes her time, and I don't stop her. It's her gift, and she can open it however the hell she likes. When the paper is off, she eyes the velvet box, mouth parting in a soft gasp.

"It's not an engagement ring." When I see a flicker of sadness in her eyes, I add, "It's not an engagement ring yet, *malishka*."

Cupping her face, I pull her closer. "I'm going to marry you, Alina. You're the only woman I've ever wanted, and you're the only woman I will ever want." I smile and give a soft laugh. "I'm going on the assumption you'll say yes when I ask you."

She laughs and gives me a wide-eyed, *you're crazy* look. "I think we both know I've been waiting for you to ask that question since I was eight."

"You won't have to wait much longer," I promise her. "Now open your gift."

Smiling, she opens the box, her mouth dropping open as her eyes grow wider. "Matvey," she whispers, running a finger over the diamonds and rubies. "They're the most beautiful earrings I've ever seen."

I hand her the other box. "You have one more to open."

She reluctantly sets the earrings aside so she can start on the second box, taking just as much time with this one as she did the last. When she opens it and sees the matching necklace, she shakes her head at me.

"It's too much."

I laugh and kiss her. "It will never be enough." Lifting the necklace up, I undo the clasp. "I want to see it on you."

She lifts her hair and as soon as it's resting on her neck, her hands reach up to touch it. Being careful to not hurt her, I slide one of the earrings into her earlobe before doing the same to the other.

"Jesus, you're beautiful," I whisper, running a finger down her neck, admiring the way the rubies look against her skin and the way the diamonds catch the light.

"Thank you, Matvey. They're gorgeous."

"No, you're gorgeous, *malishka*." I run a finger over her necklace. "This is just decoration, but it's nothing without you."

She smiles and rests her hand on my cheek, and when she leans in even closer, I cup the back of her head and bring my lips to hers. As soon as I taste her, I let out a groan. I'm already hard, straining against my jeans, but

there’s not a goddamn thing I can do about it. She feels me under her ass, and when she rocks her hips, I deepen the kiss. I know what I’m about to do is going to test me like nothing else ever has, but no way in hell am I stopping.

Grabbing her hips, I give her bottom lip another suck before lifting her up so she’s standing in front of me. Her fingers run through my hair as I pull her closer so she’s right between my thighs. Sliding my thumbs under her shirt, I stroke her bare skin while I look up at her.

“I want to try something with you.” My thumbs dip below the waistband of her pants, making her breath hitch and her fingers tighten in my hair. “Do you trust me?”

“Always,” she whispers.

“Promise me you’ll stop me if it’s too much.”

“I promise.”

I keep my eyes locked on hers, dragging my fingers along her silky smooth skin before slowly pulling her yoga pants down. I’m careful to keep her panties on, but that thin scrap of lace isn’t much of a barrier. Unable to resist, I cup her ass and pull her closer, dragging my nose along her panties, breathing her in and making myself so hard I can barely think.

When I feel her tense, I tighten my grip on her. Lifting my eyes to hers, I kiss the panty-covered pussy I’m dying to taste and whisper, “I will never hurt you. I’m not him, *malishka*.”

“I know you’re not.”

“Say my name, baby.”

“Matvey,” she whispers.

“Say it anytime you need to remind yourself who’s touching you.”

I wait for her to nod before spinning her around and sitting her on my lap so her back is pressed against my chest, her perfect ass is nestled in my lap, and she has a clear view of herself in the mirror in front of us.

Her soft gasp when she looks up and meets my eyes in the mirror is sexy as fuck. The sun is setting, but I’ve kept a lamp on so there’s enough light for me to see and just enough shadow to keep her from being too embarrassed. Running my hands down her thighs, I hook them over mine and then slowly spread my legs so hers do the same.

“What are you doing?”

When her thighs are spread wide, I lightly drag my fingers up her legs and kiss her neck. “I’m going to remind you how beautiful this is,

malishka.” My teeth graze her delicate skin. “I’m going to remind you of how good it can feel.”

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 11

Alina

I tense at his words, but I want what he's offering too badly to ask him to stop. It used to be so beautiful between us. It had felt so fucking pure and perfect, and I want that back. I want to feel that again, even if it's just for a few seconds.

His tattooed hands run up my legs, his scarred palms lightly scratching my skin and sending a shiver all through me. When he gets to my inner thighs, he keeps going, lightly dragging the pads of his fingers over my panties before gripping the bottom of my shirt. I lift up just enough for him to pull it off before sinking back against him.

The light is dim enough to hide most of my imperfections in the mirror, but when I look down, I can easily see the scars that decorate my skin, reminders of my time with Konstantin. My arms instinctively raise, trying to hide them from view, but he gently grips my forearms, pulling them from my chest and stomach so he can see me.

"Every part of you is beautiful to me," he whispers against my skin while kissing my neck.

"I'm covered in scars now," I start to say, but he shakes his head and kisses me again. Lightly dragging his fingers along my skin, he traces the silvery white marks from the times I displeased Konstantin in some way and he felt he needed to beat or cut a reminder into me—always get on your knees when I enter the room, never look me in the eyes, never make a sound unless I allow it—the rules of a sadist who secretly loved it when I forgot because that meant he got to teach me another lesson.

"Your scars don't bother me. They're a part of you, and I love every damn part of you, Alina."

I let out a soft gasp when I realize he's quoting what I once told him about his own scars. My throat grows tight and my eyes fill while his fingers run over my scars, marking each one with his touch.

"These remind me that you're alive. I could've so easily lost you, *malishka*." When he feels the worst scar, the one that runs along my stomach and curves around my hip, he lets out a groan before kissing my neck. "I'm so goddamn proud of you, Alina. Thank you for staying alive. Thank you for enduring this so I could find you and bring you home."

I whisper his name, turning my head so I can see him. "Knowing you were trying to find me was the only thing that kept me alive. Thank you for not giving up on me."

"Never." Bringing one hand up, he cups my face, tracing my lips with his thumb. "I will always find you, Alina, no matter what, but I never plan on being away from you again."

Moving his thumb, he pulls me closer so our lips are almost touching. "I remember how beautiful you always looked when I made you come."

My cheeks heat up at the memory as my heart starts to race. The hard length of him is right under my ass, and when he rocks his hips, my lips part in a gasp, that one small movement reminding me of all the times I shamelessly ground against him, chasing my pleasure.

He gives my bottom lip a soft bite. "Do you remember?"

"Yes," I whisper.

"You remember how you used to sneak into my room and slip under the covers?" The wet heat of his tongue runs along the seam of my lips, gently parting them before pulling back.

My "yes" comes out as more of a shaky whimper, and when his tongue hits my lips again, I cup the back of his head and open my mouth for more. With a deep, masculine groan he sucks my tongue into his mouth while he brings a hand to my hip, holding me in place against him. The kiss is demanding and deep but also so fucking sweet. I feel how much he loves me in every swipe of his tongue, every suck of my lips, and in every caress of his fingers.

The scarred pad of his thumb runs down my neck, lighting my body on fire with a need that I feared had been killed. Matvey effortlessly sparks it back to life, reminding me who I belong to, who I've *always* belonged to. I'm his, just like I have been from the moment I was born. There is no one

else for me. There will never be anyone else for me, and nothing will ever change that.

My breath catches when he traces the swell of one breast before dragging his fingers over my nipple. That one touch is enough to pull a moan from my chest as my hips rock and I grow embarrassingly wet.

Giving my tongue one last suck, he pulls back with a groan. His usual raspy voice is even huskier when he says, “Look at the mirror. Watch yourself, *malishka*.”

Dazed on lust and need, I turn my upper body so I’m facing the mirror again. I barely recognize the wild-eyed woman staring back at me, hips rocking and chest heaving. My nipples strain painfully against the lace of my bra, and even in the dim light I can see the growing wet stain between my thighs.

“So fucking beautiful,” he growls, watching our reflection as he drags both hands up my body so he can cup my breasts. He gives them a soft squeeze while his eyes run over me, ravenous and dark.

“This body is mine.” Letting go of me just long enough for him to unclasp my bra, he tosses it aside and groans at the sight of my bare breasts before filling his hands again. “These tits are mine.”

“Yes,” I whimper when he gently pinches my nipples.

His mouth is near my ear, and when he gives my earlobe a soft suck, I throw my head back and moan his name. With a groan, he slides one hand down my stomach, splaying it out in a possessive grip before traveling lower. Hooking a finger under my panties, he starts to pull.

“Lift up for me, baby.”

With my hands on his thighs, I lift my ass so he can pull my panties off and toss them on the floor.

“Jesus,” he growls, grabbing my inner thighs with his hands so he can spread my legs even wider. “You see how beautiful you are?”

I’m completely splayed open, every part of myself revealed in the mirror. I feel on display and vulnerable and with that feeling comes the scent of sandalwood and a familiar voice in my ear.

Wider, pet. I want to see what I’m about to fuck.

Scarred hands dig into my flesh just enough to snap me out of the unwanted memory.

“Who am I, *malishka*?”

“Matvey,” I whisper, forcing myself to take a breath.

“Do you feel this?” He drags his scarred hands over my skin again. “Do you feel the scars? No one else feels like this. I’m the only one touching you. I’m the only man who will ever touch you.” His lips run along my neck. “It’s just you and me, Alina.”

I nod and grip his thighs tighter, needing to hold onto him. “It’s just you and me,” I repeat.

One tattooed hand slips between my legs. His fingers lightly drag along my slit, pulling a whimper from me while my eyes drift closed.

“Eyes on me, baby,” he gently reminds me, waiting until our eyes meet in the mirror again. “That’s my good girl.”

The words threaten to throw me back into the dark with Konstantin, but Matvey’s voice keeps me anchored to the here and now.

“I won’t give that fucker anything else. I’m not going to allow him to ruin what we have.” He cups my pussy, pressing against me hard enough to part my lips with his finger. “This is perfect, and it’s mine, and when I make you come and you soak my hand, it’s going to be beautiful.” His lips brush against my neck. “And you are *my* good girl, Alina. You always have been, and you always will be. Nothing will ever change that.”

I nod my head, unable to form words when he starts to slowly slide his finger into me. Kissing a line along my neck, he brings his other hand up to cup my breast. While he touches me, he keeps his dark eyes locked on mine in the mirror, a constant reminder that it’s just the two of us.

“You feel just as good as I remember, so tight and perfect.”

Every touch is a reminder of our past, a memory of all the times we’ve spent together and of everything we’ve shared. My history with Matvey runs deep, to my very core, to the heart of who I am, and it’s a place that Konstantin could never reach.

My breath hitches when he swipes the pad of his thumb over my clit while he gently squeezes my nipple. I rock my hips, making him groan. His teeth graze my neck, giving me soft nips that light every cell in my body on fire with a need that threatens to consume me.

“I remember everything about your body,” he whispers against my skin. “I remember what makes you squirm.” He circles his thumb around my clit, smiling when a shiver runs through me. “I remember what makes you crazy, Alina.”

He slides another finger into me, spreading me wide while his thumb rubs my clit and his other hand massages my breast. My mouth drops open

on a whimper while my hips rock, my body desperate for more.

"And I know what makes you scream my name," he growls, pushing me over the edge with his fingers. I scream his name as the orgasm hits me. His eyes turn feral in the mirror, drinking in the sight of me coming undone. My pussy grips his fingers while he licks and sucks on my neck, guiding me through the orgasm until I'm shaking and panting in his lap.

As soon as I start to come down, everything else starts to crash in on me. Shame hits me hard, stealing the joy I'd just felt, and before I even know what's happening, tears are running down my cheeks.

"It's okay, *malishka*," he murmurs, slowly fingering me through the aftershocks. "It's just you and me, remember?"

"Mm-hmm," I moan, nodding my head as I fight off the unwanted memories and confusion that's threatening to overwhelm me.

Very slowly he slides his fingers out of me and grips my inner thigh with his wet hand, splaying me open even more.

"This is beautiful, Alina. Your pussy after I make you come is the sexiest goddamn thing I've ever seen. Look at how perfect you are right now. Do you see how flushed your skin is, how swollen your pussy is, and how hard your nipples are?"

He groans and runs his eyes over me.

"There's nothing wrong with being aroused, baby, with wanting me to make you come, and with wishing we could do more. Nothing between us could ever be bad or dirty or wrong, and it's nothing for you to ever feel ashamed of."

"I'm not," I whisper. "I'm just so fucking confused."

"I know. He took from you. He stole so goddamn much from you, and he made sex into something bad, something painful and ugly, but we're going to change that." He kisses my neck and wraps his powerful arms around my chest in a hug. "I love you, *malishka*, and I'll gladly remind you every day for the rest of our lives that what we have is beautiful and special and so fucking perfect."

"I know it is." I turn my head so I can see him, resting my palm against his cheek and breathing in his familiar scent, letting it ground me in the way that only he can. He's always been my safe place, and even now he's able to chase away all my demons.

"Thank you, Matvey."

He grins and kisses me. “For making you come? I’ll gladly do that anytime you want.”

Smiling, I shake my head. “For reminding me how beautiful it can be. I’d almost forgotten.”

His finger runs down my cheek while a soft smile plays at his lips. “I’ll always remind you.”

When I scoot on his lap, turning so I’m straddling him, he lets out a groan and lifts a dark brow at me. “What are you doing?”

It’s my turn to smile when I say, “Reminding you that I’m not quite as fragile as you think I am.”

“*Malishka*, fragile isn’t a word I would ever use to describe you. You’re the strongest person I know.” When I rock my hips, grinding against the hard length of him, he groans and adds, “And the most stubborn.”

His hands run down my back before cupping my ass and holding me in place.

“Alina,” he warns when I try to wiggle free.

Ignoring him, I run my hands down his chest and tug on his shirt until he sighs and lets go of my ass long enough for me to pull it off. The sight of his bare chest always does something to me. I swear my ability to think drops significantly anytime he shows skin. It’s like my mind goes numb, and all I can do is stare. Now is no different. Words fail me, so I use my body instead. I run my fingers over his broad shoulders, dancing them along his chest as I lean closer and kiss the tattooed skin.

This time when he says my name it’s not in warning. It’s a desperate plea for more. His fingers run through my hair, gently fisting it as I trace the letters of my name with my tongue, pulling another deep groan from him. His hips rock up, and I grind against him, watching the way his abs contract with the movement.

“You’re so beautiful, Matvey.” I whisper the words against his skin, kissing and licking and sucking my way to his neck. His deep laugh has me pulling back so I can see him. “Don’t laugh at me.”

“Never, baby.”

I can’t help but laugh at the amused look he’s still giving me. I’m always going to look at him with stars in my eyes. That’s how it’s always been, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. Even now with me straddling him naked and my hands roaming his bare skin, I feel like I need to pinch myself.

Leaning closer, I whisper, “I’m so lucky to have you.”

He drags his thumb over my bottom lip while he runs his dark eyes over me. “I’m the lucky one, *malishka*. I don’t know how you can love and want me, but I’m so goddamn grateful you do.”

“You’re the sweetest man I’ve ever met, and you’re gorgeous, Matvey. I know you’re not blind to the way women look at you.” I lift my brow at him. “I sure remember it well enough. I used to hate watching girls flirt with you.”

He cups my face, giving me his sweet smile. “I never wanted any of them, and none of them wanted me.”

“Oh yes they did.”

He gives a soft laugh at my tone. “No, baby, they didn’t. They just thought they did. You’re the only woman who’s ever known me, the *real* me, and you’re the only one I’d ever show all my scars to. I would never share that with anyone but you.”

I smile and kiss my way down his neck, savoring the taste of him. I’ve memorized every inch of this man, and I know exactly where his scars begin and end. My lips cross the boundary from smooth skin to rough scars right as he threads his fingers back into my hair and lets out a groan.

“You’re the only person who never really saw them.”

His deep, raspy voice sends another shiver down my spine while I whisper the truth against his skin.

“Everything about you drives me crazy. I’ve spent my life loving you, Matvey, and nothing will ever change how I feel about you.” I kiss his scars and run my fingers along the nape of his neck. “You’re wrong, though.” I say in between kisses. “I see your scars. I’ve always seen them.”

I pull back and bring my face to his.

“It’s just that I love them as much as I love you.”

His dark eyes lower, and it’s the only time I’ve ever seen him act nervous. “They don’t disgust you?”

Cupping his face, I can’t help but give a soft laugh. His eyes jump to mine, brow furrowed in confusion, but it softens when he sees my smile.

“Nothing about you could ever disgust me.” To prove my point, I lift up and press my bare pussy against his abs, rocking gently so he can feel how wet I am.

“Fuck,” he growls, watching me grind against him.

When I pull back, giving him a perfect view of his glistening abs, I whisper, “You’re the only man who’s ever made me wet, Matvey. In my eyes, you will always be perfect, and I will only ever belong to you.”

The raw hunger in his dark eyes should act as a warning, but I know he’ll never hurt me. His feral look doesn’t mean he’s seconds away from losing control and hurting me; it just means he wants this as much as I do. Matvey knows what I’ve been through, and because of that, he’s holding back. The tensed hard lines of his muscles and the swollen veins that run up his forearms and neck make it obvious he’s using all his willpower to keep himself in check, but he’s doing it. He’s doing it for me because he loves me and doesn’t want to scare me.

Leaning closer, I give his full, bottom lip a soft suck and run my hands down his chest and abs. My fingers run through the slickness of my own arousal before stopping at the button of his jeans. He raises a dark brow at me when I undo it and tug on the zipper.

“You were always so careful with me when I was younger. You always made me come. You let me grind against you or you used your fingers or you used your mouth, but you never let me do anything for you.”

“I didn’t want to rush you,” he groans when I drag a nail above the waistband of his boxers.

My lips barely touch his when I whisper, “I want to make you come.”

“Alina, you don’t have to do this.”

“I want to do this.” Slipping my hand in, I reach down and wrap my fingers around the hard length of him. We both groan at the contact, and when I pull him free, I freeze at the sight of him. He’s huge and rock-hard and covered in pre-cum. After two years with Konstantin, sex is something I’ve been taught to fear, but I still can’t help but be drawn to the cock that could easily tear me in two. Matvey’s thicker and longer than Konstantin, and my heart speeds up at the thought of all of that fitting inside of me, but I’m not going to spend my life afraid. I refuse to give that bastard the satisfaction. I won’t allow his memory to come between us.

Reaching out, I run a shaky finger up his length as he groans and swells even bigger. Mesmerized by the sight of him, I watch more arousal spill over his crown and drip slowly down his shaft. Unable to resist, I swipe it up with my finger and bring it to my lips.

“Alina,” he groans, watching me suck my finger clean while his strong hands grip my hips. “Tell me what you want.” He kisses and nips at my

collarbone. “Tell me what you need from me. I’ll do whatever you want, *malishka*.”

I run my fingers through his dark hair and lift my hips, scooting closer before lowering down so my pussy is pressed against his length. His feral groan mixes with my whimper as I rock my hips, letting his thick cock part my wet folds so I’m flush against him. It’s the most intimate position we can be in without him actually entering me, and he’s right. This moment, both of us exposed and vulnerable and trusting, is beautiful. What we have is beautiful, and it’s something that a man like Konstantin will never understand.

“I want to make you come, Matvey. I want to share this with you.”

He nips at my skin, kissing and licking his way to my breast while his fingers dig into my hips, encouraging me to move. The wet heat of his tongue hits my nipple, and I gasp at the rush of pleasure. He fills his mouth, sucking me in while his tongue continues to run over my nipple, and the sensation has my body aching for more. I rock my hips harder, already feeling the pull of another orgasm.

“Matvey,” I moan, “wait.”

He immediately stops, dropping my breast from his mouth and cupping my face. “Did I hurt you?” His eyes run over me, looking for clues. “Do you want to stop, baby?”

There’s no judgement in his tone, and I know if I said yes, he’d pick me up and carry me to bed, not even slightly angry that we couldn’t do more, but stopping is the last thing I want right now.

“No, and I’m not hurt.” I cover his hands with mine, giving them a soft squeeze. “But you’re about to make me come, and I don’t want to do that unless you can too.”

He gives a soft laugh, his sexy mouth curling up in a grin. “I can definitely do that.” Bringing his hands back to my hips, he moves me up the length of him, pulling another moan from my shaking body. “But I’m taking you with me, *malishka*. I want to feel this pretty pussy wet my cock. Can you do that for me? Can you be my good girl and come all over my cock?”

“Fuck,” I whisper, nearly falling over the edge from his dirty talk alone.

“Is that a yes?” The amused tone of his voice brings my eyes back to his.

“Yes.” My cheeks heat up at the intense look in his eyes. “Help me, Matvey,” I whisper against his lips. “Help me come.”

With a deep groan, he keeps a firm grip on my hips, slowly moving me up and down the length of him.

“You hear how wet you are?” He nips at my bottom lip. “You’re making a beautiful mess all over my cock, and I fucking love it.”

My nipples scrape along his chest when he moves me faster. The slick pressure against my clit pushes me closer and closer to the edge while his tongue parts my lips, delving inside in a hungry kiss. I give myself to him, opening my mouth as my body relaxes, letting him take full control because I know I’m safe in his hands.

“Let go, *malishka*,” he growls against my lips. “I’ve got you.”

With his lips on mine, and his scent all around me, I let go and embrace the orgasm that crashes into me with a blinding force. He growls my name when he feels me come undone on his cock before falling off the edge with me. My arms wrap around his neck, crashing our bodies tightly together. His deep, masculine groans vibrate against my chest as his cock pulses against my pussy with his climax. The wet heat of his release hits our stomachs while he sucks my tongue and palms my ass cheeks.

With one last groan, he cups the back of my head and slows the kiss down. My fingers trace the lines of his face, wanting to memorize every second of this moment. I feel him smile against my lips before he whispers, “I love you, Alina.”

“I love you, Matvey,” I whisper back, making him smile even bigger. It’s a full smile, a blinding, face-lit-up smile, and he looks so gorgeous it makes my heart ache.

His thumb caresses my cheek before lightly running over my bottom lip. “Was it too much?”

“No, it was perfect.” I dip my chin and kiss his thumb. “It was more than perfect. Thank you.”

“For letting you grind against my cock while we both come?” He gives me a wink. “You’re more than welcome.”

I smile at the sound of his carefree laugh, and I’m so happy that it takes me a second to realize I didn’t hear Konstantin’s voice in my head, and the only scent surrounding me is the perfect mix of citrus and cedar—the clean, unmistakeable scent of Matvey.

“What is it?” His dark eyes search mine, worry causing his brow to furrow again.

I kiss him and smile. “It’s just you and me. You kept him out of my head.”

He relaxes at my words and brushes back a strand of hair before kissing me again. “Just you and me,” he repeats. “Always, *malishka*.”

Surrounded by his warmth and with my body relaxed from the orgasms, I can’t stop the yawn when it hits me. He smiles and kisses me again.

“Do you want a bath before bed?”

“No. I want to fall asleep like this.”

Wrapping an arm under my ass and the other around my back, he stands, taking me with him. I kiss his neck before he lays me down, but when he tries to stand back up, I tighten my arms and legs around him, refusing to let him go.

His breath is whisper soft against my skin when he gives a soft laugh. “I’m just taking my pants off, *malishka*. I’m not going anywhere.”

I let him go with one last kiss and then watch him pull the jeans down his muscular thighs. He’s still semi-hard, and I’m guessing it wouldn’t take much to get him fully hard again, but he sees how tired I am and shakes his head.

“Don’t even think about it. You need sleep.”

He gets into bed beside me, but before he pulls the covers up, he groans and drags his fingers over my wet stomach.

“You look incredibly sexy covered in my cum.”

I watch as he slowly coats his fingers and then drags them lower. He doesn’t stop until my pussy is glistening with his seed.

“Perfect,” he murmurs, giving my clit a soft tap before cradling my body against his and pulling the covers over us.

With our naked bodies pressed together and his strong arms around me, I’ve never felt safer. His hand runs through my hair, lulling me into a deep, peaceful sleep that’s free of Konstantin and all the painful memories that Matvey is slowly pushing further and further away.

The next morning I wake to the feel of his lips on my neck, and the deep, sexy sound of his voice in my ear.

“Morning, *malishka*. Time to get up.”

“What? Why?” I try to burrow further under the blankets, but he just laughs and yanks them off me, scooping me into his arms with an ease that

surprises me.

“Did you spend the last two years in the gym?”

“Pretty much,” he admits, walking me into the bathroom. We’re still naked, and as soon as I catch sight of him in the mirror, I let out an appreciative sigh. He laughs and sets me down so he can grab his toothbrush and start the shower. I do the same, brushing my teeth while I run my eyes over him. He winks at me when I manage to pull my eyes back to his face.

“Why aren’t we sleeping in?”

He grins and pulls me to the shower. “I have a surprise for you.”

Matvey’s gentle touch when he guides me under the spray of water and threads his fingers in my hair is so at odds with the overall brute strength of this man. He’s a wall of gorgeous muscle in front of me, but even though I know what this body could do to me, I’m never scared when I’m around him. I know exactly what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a man’s fists, but I also know that Matvey would rather die than hurt me. The strong hands that are now gently washing my hair will never be raised to me in anger.

Leaning into his touch, I kiss his palm while he smiles down at me. “Do I get any hints about this surprise?”

He tilts my head back and starts to rinse my hair. “You’re not expecting it.”

I laugh and try not to get distracted by the rivulets of water running down his tattooed chest. “Well that narrows it down.”

“It’s a surprise,” he reminds me. “You’re not supposed to guess it.”

Reaching over, he grabs the body wash and lathers up my pink bath pouf with it. The citrusy scent mixes with the steam, and my eyes close as I breathe it in, feeling instantly calm and happy. When I open my eyes, he’s staring down at me, head tilted and one dark brow lifted.

“What were you just thinking?”

“The body wash smells like you.” I step closer and run my fingers along his shoulders before pulling him down so I can smell his neck. “You always smell like a mix of citrus and cedar, but underneath it is your own scent, and the combination of all three does something to me.”

He runs his fingers down my wet spine, groaning when I press my stomach against his erection. “What does it do, *malishka*?”

I let out a sigh when I feel his coarse fingers drag along my ass before cupping a cheek in each hand. “It makes me feel safe,” I whisper over the sound of the water hitting our bodies. “It makes me feel like I’m home.”

“I am your home, Alina, just like you’re mine.” He gives my ass one last squeeze before sliding his hands back up my body to cup my face. “You will always be safe with me.”

“I know.”

When I smile and slide my hands down his wet chest and abs, he groans and gives a soft laugh.

“You’ve always been my temptation.” His lips brush against mine in a soft kiss. “But, unfortunately, we do actually have an appointment that we need to keep.”

“We do?”

He sighs and threads his fingers through my hair, cupping the back of my head and molding our bodies together.

“We do, but I’m going to be thinking about your wet, naked body all goddamn day.”

Before I can say I’ll be doing the same, he kisses me again, this time slower and deeper, and when he finally pulls back, I’m more than a little dazed. He smiles and hands me the bath pouf before wetting his own hair.

“I don’t trust myself to finish washing you.”

While he shampoos his hair, his eyes stay locked on my hands, watching me wash myself until I’m convinced he won’t be able to even zip his damn pants because nothing is going to be able to contain that thing.

“I’ll be fine,” he says, giving another deep laugh when he catches me staring at his cock. He grips his thick shaft in one tattooed hand, and I can’t take my eyes off the way he’s slowly stroking himself. Feeling bold, I step closer.

“How much time do we have?”

The corner of his mouth lifts up in a sexy smile. “What are you planning in that beautiful head of yours?”

Smiling, I take a step backwards and then another, not stopping until I feel the tiled wall behind me. Curling my finger, I beckon him closer. He closes the distance, looking lethal and sexy, until he’s invading my space and towering over me. Fear is the last thing I feel, though. Reaching out, I wrap my hand over his as he continues to work himself.

“I never could resist you,” he whispers, dragging his nose along my cheek until our lips are almost touching. “What do you need from me, *malishka*?”

“I want you to come on me again.”

He nips at my bottom lip. “Why?”

“I like it.” I groan when he moves his hand, wrapping his around mine so we’ve changed places and it’s my fingers gripping his cock as he guides me up and down the length of him. “It makes me feel close to you. It makes me feel safe.”

With a growl, he brings his other hand to my face, cupping my cheek as he sucks on my bottom lip.

“Touch yourself.”

The deep, raspy sound of his voice has my thighs squeezing together.

“I’m not coming without you, so you better get that hand on your pussy, *malishka*.”

When I hesitate, he nips on my bottom lip again and gives a deep, masculine groan. “Better hurry.”

He grips my hand tighter around his cock while I bring my other one between my legs.

“Good girl,” he groans, stroking my cheek with his thumb while he watches me touch myself. “That’s my good girl, so fucking wet for me.”

Matvey’s filthy mouth always makes me crazy, and when I slide a finger inside myself, I’m not at all surprised to find that I’m soaking wet. My breathy moan hits his lips, making him smile.

“I could watch you fuck yourself all day long, *malishka*, but we need to be quick.” He brings his free hand to my breast, cupping it in his hand. Spreading his fingers, he lets my nipple poke through so he can squeeze it, and when I let out another whimper, I feel his cock swell beneath my hand.

“Rub your clit, sweetheart.” His tongue gently flicks my upper lip. He waits until I obey him. My slippery fingers run over my swollen clit while my hips rock up for more.

“Fuck,” he groans. His hand tightens over mine, working himself harder and faster while he keeps my nipple in a firm pinch that magnifies the pleasure already coursing through my body.

“Come for me, Alina, right fucking now.”

It’s a command that my body immediately obeys. My thighs quiver as I moan his name. Ecstasy runs through me, making my pussy clench and my

knees threaten to buckle. Before I can fall, his strong thigh is between mine, pressing against me and holding me in place while he growls my name. Right as I feel the wet heat of his release hit my stomach, he groans and kisses me hard, sucking my tongue into his mouth as his cock pulses in my hand. I keep rubbing my clit, riding the aftershocks while I grind my pussy against his strong thigh.

"Give me your fingers," he growls against my lips. "Let me taste you, *malishka*."

I give my clit one last rub before bringing my fingers to our lips. He lets go of my breast to grab my wrist, making sure to keep his touch gentle and away from my stitches. Guiding my fingers to his mouth, he watches me as he slowly licks and sucks one of my fingers clean. He cups the back of my head, pulling me closer so our lips are almost touching. He's still holding my wet fingers up between us, and when he arches a brow and darts his tongue out for another taste, I know he wants me to join in.

He licks his way up my middle finger, and when I do the same, he groans and brushes his tongue over mine, kissing me deeply, a tangle of tongues and fingers and the taste of my pussy filling both our mouths. He's already growing hard again in my hand, and when I start to stroke him, he breaks the kiss with a groan.

"Fucking hell, baby." He gives a soft laugh and shakes his head. "The things you do to me."

Bringing both his hands to my stomach, he slowly rubs his cum into my skin and over my breasts, and when he's satisfied, he replaces his thigh with his hand, cupping my pussy in a possessive grip that sends a warmth all through me, because being owned by Matvey is all I've ever wanted.

"So beautiful," he whispers, kissing a line along my cheek. "Today you're going to walk around covered in me. Anytime someone else tries to get into your head, I want you to remember that you're mine and no one else's. The only voice I want you to hear is mine. The only touch I want you to remember is mine." His lips graze the shell of my ear. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," I whisper in a shaky breath.

"Who do you belong to, *malishka*?"

"You, only you."

He kisses my ear and gives my pussy a soft pat. "Good girl, baby."

Stepping back, he turns off the water without bothering to rinse either of us off and smiles.

“Time to go. Better hurry up, sweetheart, someone’s made us late.”

I laugh and grab the towel he offers me, not feeling even remotely guilty about the extra long shower.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 12

Matvey

"We're not taking your car?"

"*Our* car," I correct, smiling at how fucking adorable she looks all bundled up. The pink snow hat she's wearing has a big puffy ball on top, and the down jacket I insisted she wear has nearly swallowed her up. Add in the scarf and mittens and she looks good enough to eat.

"We're not taking *our* car?" she asks with a smile.

Grabbing her mittened hand in mine, I guide her out of our building and onto the busy street. "It's easier this way."

Her blue-green eyes scan the crowd, and just like I'm expecting, her brow furrows and she worries her bottom lip while her fingers tighten around mine. Over the last few days, Alina has transformed before my eyes. She laughs more, her smiles come easily, and she's able to enjoy a level of sexual intimacy with me that I feared we'd never have again. I'm so fucking proud of her, but I can't let us fall into the trap of thinking everything's okay because things are getting better in the penthouse. I won't let her get into the habit of hiding from the world. I love her too much to do that. She needs to be a part of the world, not hide from it and that's what today's surprise is all about.

Pulling her closer, I bring my mouth to hers, sucking her bottom lip free. "You're safe with me," I remind her.

She nods, but I can tell she's still scared. Her eyes dart around, looking at all the people I couldn't give the slightest fuck about.

"They grabbed me from a busy road," she whispers. Her breathing picks up, and when I feel her body start to shake, I rest my forehead against hers, cupping her face in my hands so I'm all she can see.

“Breathe with me, *malishka*.”

Her words sound frantic when she says, “People are staring.”

“There’s just you and me, baby.” Keeping my face close to hers, I quickly pull off my gloves and shove them in the pockets of my coat. Bringing my bare palms to her skin, I cup her face again and stroke her cheek with my thumbs, letting her feel my scars.

“Take a deep breath with me.”

She keeps her focus on me, breathing in when I do and holding the breath until I slowly let mine out. She copies me until I feel her relax. I run the pad of my thumb over her bottom lip.

“You’re safe,” I repeat. “I will not leave you alone, not for one second.”

When she gives a soft nod, I smile and quickly look at the city around us. “We own this part of the city, *malishka*. Nothing happens here that we don’t know about.” I let go of her cheek so I can point at the black SUV parked across the street about a hundred feet ahead of us. “Do you see that?”

“Yes.”

“Those are some of our men. They’ll be keeping an eye on things because I’m not willing to take any chances when it comes to you. Anytime you step foot outside that penthouse, you will always have at least three sets of eyes on you at all times.”

When her eyes widen and she opens her mouth to say something, I gently close it and press my thumb over her lips again.

“That’s absolutely nonnegotiable. You will never be unprotected again, no matter what. You were taken once, and I’ll never forgive myself for that. I won’t allow it to happen again.”

I kiss her once more before standing back up to my full height and taking her hand back in mine.

“Come on. We’re not going far, just a few blocks.”

She nods and squeezes my hand while her other one grips my forearm, hugging me tightly against her chest. Most people are already at work for the day, but the sidewalk and streets are still busy. We walk around a group of women who are huddled over their phones, trying to figure out directions, and then wait to cross the street.

“Do you want some coffee?”

Her cheeks are pink from the wind when she looks up at me. “I thought you said we were late.”

“We are, so we might as well get some coffee.”

She smiles and nods. “Okay. It’ll help keep us warm.”

I pull her hat down even further and make sure her scarf is covering her neck before I kiss the red tip of her nose.

“I promise I’ll warm you up later.”

“You better.”

I laugh at her tone and once we’ve crossed the street, we step into the first coffee shop we see. The familiar scents of coffee and sugar envelop us along with the strong heater they have running. Alina sighs with relief as the warmth hits her face. I smile down at her, squeezing her hand while we join the short line up front.

Most of the tables are already taken, and when I scan the crowd, I see mainly college students, a few moms with strollers, and businessmen stopping in for a quick coffee on their way to the office. I don’t see anyone who makes me suspicious, but I do see a few men eyeing Alina in a way that makes me want to cut their eyes right out of their fucking heads. Bringing my hand to the nape of her neck, I pull her closer and kiss her head while making eye contact with the man who’s staring the hardest. I give a soft laugh when he quickly looks away.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing, baby,” I tell her, “just some jackass who was enjoying looking at you a little too much.”

She laughs and shakes her head like she doesn’t believe me, but that’s just Alina. She’s never understood how unbelievably beautiful she is.

When I look back up, the man is gripping his phone, making a point to keep his eyes on the screen and off my woman. Satisfied, I smile and when the customer in front of us steps aside, we take her place and look at the menu.

“Do you know what you want, baby?”

“Oh my god what language is that? It’s so pretty.”

I look over to see a young blonde with a big smile on her face and a hungry look in her eyes.

Switching to English, I say, “It’s Russian.”

She giggles and takes in the tattoos on my neck and hands, and then she makes the mistake most women make when they see my face. She sees a handsome man she’d like to fuck, a guy with dark eyes and a pissed-off scowl that she somehow thinks doesn’t apply to her. The young barista

who’s currently eye-fucking me has no idea that the only woman I smile for is the one my arm is currently wrapped around.

“Some things never change,” Alina mutters in Russian.

“And some things do,” I counter, leaning down and cupping her face. “We don’t have to hide our relationship anymore, *malishka*. Roman knows I’m going to marry his sister, and the sooner I get a ring on your finger, the better.”

I kiss her slowly, not giving the slightest fuck that we’re holding up the line and causing a scene. Nothing is going to stop me from touching and tasting the woman I love any goddamn time I want. It’s a privilege that’s been denied me for the last two years, and I’ll be damned if I let it ever happen again.

When I hear the man behind us clear his throat, I give Alina’s bottom lip one last suck, caressing her cheek with my thumb before standing back up. I turn to the man behind me, but he quickly looks away, pretending that he wasn’t just trying to get me to hurry up.

The barista blushes when I look back at her, but she manages to keep it professional when she looks at Alina and asks her what she wants. After we place our order and pay, we step aside to wait.

“I almost forgot how much attention you attract.”

I look down at Alina and laugh. “Me? Every guy in here has been staring at you, and it’s driving me fucking crazy. There’s a lot of eyeballs in this place that I’d like to remove.”

She holds up a plastic stirrer from the display in front of us. “Too bad there’s nothing but plastic utensils in here.”

I lean closer so my lips are by her ear. “*Malishka*, did you seriously think I’d leave the penthouse unarmed?”

“No, I guess not, but don’t get your knife out just yet. If I’m not going to blind the barista for the way she was eye-fucking you, then you don’t need to be removing any eyeballs either.”

I smile at the bite in her tone, and kiss her cheek. “Don’t worry, *malishka*. You’re the only woman who will ever see me naked.”

“Good,” she whispers right as my name is called.

I kiss her again, and then we grab our drinks and leave. Thanks to the coffee, the last half of the walk isn’t nearly as cold, and when we take a few turns and hit a row of brick townhouses, Alina looks around in confusion.

“What are we doing?”

I give her a wink and pull her down the sidewalk. When I look back, I see the black SUV turn down the street and parallel park, keeping us in view as Alina and I stop in front of the fifth townhouse in the line. They're all identical, so the owners have done little things to try and differentiate them. Several have chosen to paint their doors different colors, while others have added little decorations like welcome signs or potted plants. The one we stop in front of has a red door and a little garden gnome tucked into the corner of the alcove. He has a green hat and a long, white beard.

Raising my hand, I knock on the door and then pull Alina closer. "I really hope you like this," I whisper, suddenly feeling nervous. It had seemed like a good idea, but now that we're here, I'm starting to second-guess it. My brothers were all for it, but that's not saying much. If it were up to us, our women would be embedded with trackers and they would never be more than five feet away from us. So what makes perfect sense to us, might not go over so well with them.

The door opens before Alina can ask any questions. The man standing in front of us is wearing a friendly smile and a beard that's oddly similar to his garden gnome. He holds out a hand to me.

"You must be Matvey." He turns his smile to Alina. "And you must be Alina. Hi, I'm Ralph."

"Hi," she says, smiling but keeping her arm around my waist and her body close to mine.

I shake his hand. "Sorry we're a little late. The line at the coffeeshop was a bit longer than we thought."

A flush creeps up Alina's cheeks because we both know it wasn't the short line at the coffeeshop that made us late. It was her horny ass in the shower that did it, not that I'm complaining. I don't care if we're ever on time for anything again.

"Come on in." Ralph steps aside and motions us in. "He's all ready for you."

"He?" Alina lifts a brow at me, looking around Ralph's living room for a clue, but all she sees is the leather sectional and a mounted, flat-screen TV. It isn't until Ralph gives a short whistle and a large German Shepherd comes running in to sit at his feet that it hits her. Her eyes widen and jump to mine. "Matvey," she whispers before a huge smile spreads across her beautiful face.

I take her coffee and set them both on the end table near the sofa. “Do you like him?”

She looks at the black-and-tan dog who’s still sitting and waiting for his next command. His amber eyes are alert as he looks between us with his head cocked and ears raised.

“He’s beautiful.”

“He’s not just beautiful,” I tell her. “He’s a service dog.”

“What?”

Ralph reaches down and pets the dog’s head. “He’s been trained to offer support for people who have panic attacks or anxiety. He offers emotional support, but he’ll also wake you if you’re having night terrors, comfort you if you have a panic attack, or even alert you if he thinks one is about to happen. To be honest,” he says with a soft laugh, “I think everyone could benefit from having a dog like this, or any pet for that matter. They just make life more enjoyable in my opinion. He’s a sweet boy, aren’t you, Finn?”

The dog’s head lifts at the sound of his name and his tail starts wagging. Alina smiles and squats down, laughing when he quickly walks over to sniff her fingers. He licks her hand and then sits next to her while she runs her hands through his fur. I squat down next to her, and the smile she gives me lets me know I’ve made the right choice.

As much as I want to be next to her every second of every day, it’s not realistic, and, if I’m being honest, probably not all that healthy, but Finn can be with her whenever she needs a bit of comfort or whenever she’s feeling scared or anxious. What she doesn’t know is that Ralph also trains dogs for personal protection. Finn isn’t just an emotional support dog. He’s also a highly trained killer who will rip the throat out of anyone who tries to hurt her. Finn is what Vitaly would call a twofer, and I can already tell he’s worth every penny of the enormous price tag.

We spend the next hour with Ralph as he teaches Alina the different commands and gives them a chance to bond. I’m not at all surprised to see that Finn already seems smitten with Alina. His amber eyes follow her around everywhere she moves, always on alert, waiting for her if she needs him.

When Ralph’s satisfied that Alina and Finn are a good match, he smiles and goes to grab some supplies. He helps Alina put on the red vest with *Service Dog* written on it before handing over Finn’s leash.

“Don’t be afraid to put that vest on him and take him wherever you want him to go. He’s registered to you as a service dog, so that means you have the right to have him with you. Restaurants, airplanes, inside buildings, it doesn’t matter. This is your right, so don’t be afraid to use it.” He hands her his business card. “If you have any questions at all, give me a call.”

“I will.” She takes the card and tucks it into her back pocket. “Thank you so much.”

“It’s my pleasure. When your fiancé called me, I knew Finn would be the perfect match for you. He’s the only dog I’ve ever worked with who can be just as sweet as he can be fierce. He’ll keep you safe just as easily as he’ll comfort you through a panic attack or nightmare.”

“He’s perfect,” Alina agrees, already in love with the dog.

I shake his hand and thank him again, holding the leash so Alina can get bundled back up. She’s so excited that she doesn’t bother tying her scarf or putting her mittens on. Yeah, that’s not going to cut it. I stop her in the entryway, ignoring the cute, stubborn scowl she gives me for making her wait while I zip her coat all the way up and tie her scarf. She lets out a frustrated huff of air when I pull her mittens from her pockets and hold them up.

“I’m not going to freeze to death,” she pouts while I slip the first mitten on her hand.

“No, you sure as fuck will not,” I say, raising a brow and pulling her other mitten on, and just because I’m a stubborn ass, I take my time pulling her hat down before finally kissing her nose and opening the door.

With a laugh, she steps outside, keeping her eyes on Finn, even though the dog is glued to her side and shows no interest in being anywhere else. Reaching back, she grabs my hand and then wraps her arm around my waist, pulling me in for a hug.

“Thank you so much for this.”

I wrap my arms around her and kiss her forehead. “You’re welcome, *malishka*. I’m so happy you love him. Remember when you were little and you had that German Shepherd stuffed animal that you carried around everywhere?”

She lifts her head to give me a surprised look. “You remember that?”

“Of course I do. I was part of the search team when you lost it that one time.”

She laughs and the sound of it makes me smile. I'd been so afraid that she'd never be able to give a carefree laugh again, but Alina continues to amaze me with her strength, and I've quickly learned to never underestimate her.

"You found him under my bed, hidden behind some toys." She looks to the side, replaying the memory with a smile. "You were always taking care of me, Matvey, even then."

"And I always will." Giving her another kiss, I take her hand and lead her back to the street. "Come on, baby. Let's go show him his new home."

By the time we're taking the elevator up to the penthouse, Alina and I are both completely in love with the newest addition to the Melnikov family. I've always wanted a dog, and I'd thought about getting one while we were looking for Alina, but the idea of doing it without her depressed me. I'm glad I waited, because seeing her with him is the cutest goddamn thing ever. I've already taken several photos and a few videos, and her new wallpaper on her phone is a photo of me and Finn.

Fucking adorable.

"Oh my god, he's so cute!" Emily yells as soon as the doors open and she sees the dog. "Am I allowed to pet him?"

"Yeah, of course," Alina tells her, unhooking Finn's leash so he can walk around and explore. Emily scratches his head before he sniffs around and then follows us into the kitchen. When Alina sees all the bags on the counter, she looks up at me. "What is all this?"

"We can't have your dog eating off our fancy plates, now can we?"

We look over to see Vitaly walking over with Katya. She laughs at her husband. "We don't have fancy plates." Katya smiles at Alina. "Don't listen to him. He's the one who spent an hour in the dog food aisle, trying to find the best stuff. Finn is going to be eating like a king."

"Beautiful dog," Lev says while everyone else gathers around to meet Finn. Ralph had said it was fine to treat him like a pet as long as everyone remembered he still had a job to do. His main focus should always be Alina, and he should always be able to get to her if necessary. I'd texted them all the info while Alina had been getting lessons from Ralph, and Vitaly had volunteered to get all the supplies.

Vitaly motions towards all the bags. "It's a good thing I had Roman's minivan to load all this stuff into. I also put several dog beds throughout the penthouse so he can nap wherever he wants, and I wasn't sure about toys,

so I kind of just bought anything that looked fun." He looks over at Roman. "It handles like a dream, by the way. If your stubborn ass would try driving it, you'd know that."

"I'm never driving it," Roman says, bending down to pet Finn. "You're getting my Porsche back." He pets the dog's head and then points to Vitaly. "He's the one you're allowed to bite."

Vitaly laughs while Finn licks Roman's finger.

I walk around the island and start pulling out stuff to make sandwiches. Alina hasn't eaten yet, and she needs some lunch. Seeing the sonogram pictures on the fridge has me looking over at Lev. "The appointment's today, right?"

He grins and reaches over to lay his hand on Jolene's stomach. "Yeah, we need to leave soon."

"Don't worry," I tell him. "It'll be a girl."

He scrubs a hand over his jaw, running a thumb over the lip ring in the corner of his mouth, trying like hell to hide his smile. We all know he's hoping like hell they're having a little girl.

He kisses his wife's head. "I'll be happy no matter what."

She laughs. "Yeah, but if it's a boy, we're in big trouble. You've already bought an entire closetful of pink baby clothes."

Lev smiles and shrugs. "We'll have a girl eventually, *malinkaya*. I'll make damn sure of that."

We all laugh while Jolene blushes and rolls her eyes at her husband.

"I'm telling you, we need to keep the minivan," Vitaly says. "We're going to need three or four of them to cart around all the babies we're going to be having."

Alina laughs, but I notice the way she ducks her head and reaches for Finn. The dog immediately sits next to her, leaning his weight against her leg in a move that's designed to comfort her. When she looks back up, I give her a wink and start to make our lunch.

After Jolene and Lev leave, we take our food downstairs, but instead of sitting in my lap like usual, Alina sits down next to me.

"I just want to try," she starts to explain, but I hook a finger under her jaw, tilting her face up to mine.

"You don't need to explain yourself to me, *malishka*. You're always welcome in my lap, and I love feeding you. That will always be an option for you. I don't care where we are or who sees us, if you need in my lap,

then I want you in my lap." I smile and kiss her lips. "But if you're ready to try eating on your own, then we can try that. Whatever you need, that's what we'll do."

She grips my wrist and gives it a squeeze. "It might not work." Her voice is whisper-soft and hesitant.

"Then I'll feed you and we'll try again some other time. No pressure, baby."

She nods and I give her one more kiss before letting her go. Finn sits at her feet, waiting and watching. I take a bite of my own sandwich, not wanting her to feel like she's under a microscope, even though I am watching every move she makes. She looks at her food, gives a soft sigh, and then picks up her sandwich. Sensing her growing anxiety, Finn rests his head on her thigh and turns those big eyes up at her. The cute, puppy-dog look is enough to pull a soft laugh from her, and she pets his head while she takes a bite, and then another, and then another.

I'm too afraid to break whatever magic spell is going on, so we eat in silence until her plate is empty. When she's finished her last bite, she looks over at me, and the proud grin on her face has me fucking beaming at her. Setting our plates aside, I pull her into my lap and kiss her.

"I'm so fucking proud of you, *malishka*."

"All I did was eat, you know, like every other normal person does."

"Hey, don't you dare downplay what just happened." Cupping her face, I kiss her again and wrap my arms around her. "This is huge, sweetheart, and I'm so goddamn proud of you."

I hold her for a few more minutes before we get up to take care of Finn. We get all of his things set up, making sure he knows where all his comfy beds are located as well as his water and food dish. He takes it all in stride, but I swear the dog's eyes light up when we take him out to the rooftop and he runs past the pool and hot tub to the large patch of artificial grass that's at the end of the terrace. He sniffs every inch of it and then looks back at Alina. She laughs and gives the command for him to use the bathroom.

"I guess this will work in between walks to the park," I tell her, laughing when he starts running around again.

We stay outside for a few more minutes until not even my arms wrapped around her can keep her warm, and then we go inside to wait with the others for Lev and Jolene to get back. Alina and I are sitting on the couch with Finn sprawled out on one of his dog beds when the elevator

doors open. As soon as I see Lev's face, I know they're having a girl. His huge smile says it all.

"I knew it was a girl," I tell him, walking over with Alina, who quickly pulls the two of them in for a hug.

"Congratulations, brother," Roman says, while Danil laughs and smacks Lev's shoulder.

"Man, you're going to have your hands full," Vitaly tells him. He laughs and waves a hand at Lev's solid frame and pierced face. "I pity the poor fucker who comes knocking on your door and asking for a date."

Lev groans at the thought. "She's going to have bodyguards. Lots of them."

Jolene laughs and shakes her head, but we all know he's being serious. That little girl is going to be heavily guarded, and I can't say I blame him. After what happened to Alina, I can't imagine letting any future daughters we may have out of my sight. I keep my arm around Alina while we pass around the sonogram pictures, and it's impossible to not think about the possibility of one day having our own. I try not to think about it because I don't want to overwhelm her. She's been through way too much to even think about kids right now, but there's no denying that the thought of a pregnant Alina makes me very fucking happy.

"I can't wait to get started on your nursery," Katya tells them. "I've sketched a few ideas for you both to look through. Just let me know what you want, and then I'll get started."

Jolene grins and gives a small, excited jump that has Lev scowling and putting his hands on her shoulders in an obvious attempt to keep her grounded. She laughs and tilts her head back so she can look up at him. "It was a very small jump," she points out.

He smiles and kisses her nose while he rests both his hands on her pregnant belly. "Small jumps are still jumps. I don't think our daughter should be bounced around in there."

Jolene laughs again. "You do know that's not how it works, right?"

He laughs and gently pats her stomach. "Pregnancy has made you sassy, *malinkaya*."

She pats his hand right back and says, "Yeah, you keep telling yourself that."

He leans down and whispers something in her ear that makes her eyes widen and her cheeks turn a bright red. Before he stands back up, he kisses

her cheek and lets out another laugh when he sees how flushed she is.

Clearly flustered, Jolene tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and clears her throat. She looks over at Katya and gives a small laugh. “Think we could look at those sketches now?”

“Yeah, of course, I left them upstairs.”

When Jolene starts to follow, Lev swats her ass as she goes. She looks over her shoulder at him, but anger is the last thing on her face. Lev gives another laugh and watches her walk off. Simona and Emily join them, and when Alina looks up at me, I smile and kiss her.

“Have fun, *malishka*. I’ll be here if you need me.”

“Okay,” she gives me another kiss before joining the others with Finn right at her side.

“Do I even want to know what you just whispered to my sister-in-law?” Vitaly asks.

Lev laughs. “No, you do not.”

As soon as the women disappear upstairs, Danil leans against the counter and sighs. “Okay, everything’s on track for the auction. Casimir’s been keeping up the dark web side of things, dropping pics of girls that they think they’ll be betting on. It’s gotten a lot of attention, and there’s no hint of anyone suspecting anything. In fact, guests have already started arriving. Five of them checked into hotels in the city this morning. The rest will be arriving tomorrow.”

“Has Dominic’s man arrived?” Lev asks.

Danil shakes his head. “No, thank god. Lars’s flight is scheduled to come in tomorrow afternoon. No way in fuck could we get him to behave himself if he were in the city already, and I can’t say I blame him. The temptation would be way too fucking great.”

“Tell me about it.” I give a harsh laugh, remembering how hard it had been to keep myself away from Konstantin once we learned he was the one keeping Alina. It had taken all four of my brothers to do it and the firm knowledge that I would be putting her life at risk if I acted too soon.

“You did the right thing,” Roman reminds me.

“Knowing it was the right thing didn’t make it any easier to sit around and wait.”

“No, but sneaking out and killing those men probably helped,” Vitaly says, making me smile at the memory.

Lev leans against the counter. “What are your plans with Konstantin and Osip?”

Everyone looks at me, waiting for my answer. I know they’ve been wondering, especially since it’s been over a week since my last visit to the garage.

“Timofey and Pyotr are keeping them alive for me,” I tell them. “I’ll end it soon enough.”

Knowing I need to handle this in my own way, they drop the subject and we start going over the plans for tomorrow night. The truth is I’m not exactly sure what I’m going to do with the two bastards. With Finn here, I’d feel better about leaving Alina to go finish things with them, but something stops me from doing it. It just doesn’t feel like the right time yet.

After we’re sure everything is in place and ready for tomorrow, I go and find Alina. They’re sitting in the room that will soon be transformed into what I’m guessing will be a nursery fit for a princess by the time these five are done with it. Alina looks up, and when she sees me leaning against the doorway watching her, a smile spreads across her face before she jumps up and walks over to me.

“Having fun?”

“Yeah, Katya’s sketches are amazing. It’s going to look really cute when she’s done with it.”

Grabbing my hand, she pulls me over so she can show me everything, and as great as it all looks, it’s Alina’s smiling face that’s really captured my attention. I pull her towards me and brush a strand of her dark hair back before lowering down and kissing her gently. My thumb caresses her jaw, and I feel her smile against my lips as she wraps me in a tight hug. When I pull back, I laugh when I see four sets of eyes on us. They’re making no attempt at being discreet, and when Emily starts laughing, the others join in.

“Sorry,” Simona says. “This is just taking some getting used to.”

“It’s just so odd to see you like this,” Emily adds and then quickly says, “in a good way!”

I step behind Alina and wrap my arms around her, pulling her against me.

Alina reaches up to grab onto the forearm I have resting on her upper chest. “To see him like what?”

“God, where to begin?” Emily says like she’s pondering the question before she starts holding up her fingers as she ticks off various things that

she’s never seen me do before. “He’s smiling and laughing and looking happy and touching someone and letting someone touch him.”

“He’s also not spending hours in the gym every day, punching the bag like a man obsessed,” Jolene adds.

Katya looks me over. “He’s happy, like genuinely happy, and I’ve never seen him like that before.”

“I haven’t either,” Simona agrees. “It’s the first time we’ve ever seen him give a full smile.”

“You realize I’m still standing here, right?” I ask them.

“It’s true, though,” Emily says, continuing to talk over me with a grin. “He was a very different man a few weeks ago, and we’re all thrilled to see him so happy.” This time she looks up at me when she says, “We’re all really happy for you both.”

Alina tilts her head back to look at me, a grin playing at her lips because she knows how much I hate attention, but it’s worth it if it makes her look at me like the way she is right now. Seeing her like this makes me think that maybe the worst is behind us. She’s so carefree and full of hope, and when she reaches down to pet Finn, I let myself believe that the old Alina really is back, that *my* Alina is back, but I realize I was a little too optimistic when later on that night, her screams wake me from a deep sleep.

I’m so groggy that it takes me a second to notice the difference. Instead of her usual shaking body and a mouth open in silent horror and fear, it’s loud, piercing screams mixed with Finn’s whining as he licks and nuzzles her face, trying to get her to wake up.

“Alina, baby,” I yell, scooping her into my arms and cradling her face against my chest. “It’s okay. I’ve got you. You’re safe.”

Finn is so upset that he whines and licks her hand until her screams stop and turn into a painful sob that breaks my damn heart.

“I thought it was over.” Her words are muffled by her sobs, but I hear every word like it’s another scream.

“Is everything okay?”

I hear Danil’s worried voice yelling through the door, no doubt seconds away from breaking it down.

“It’s fine,” I yell back. “Just a nightmare.”

I turn my attention back to Alina, who’s still shaking in my arms. She’d looked so damn happy earlier, so much like her old self, and now she’s gasping for air, sobbing so hard she can’t catch a breath.

“Breathe, *malishka*. I need you to breathe for me.”

Cradling her head against my chest, I stroke her cheek and keep her in my lap, slowly rocking her in our bed. Her face is pressed against my chest, letting her feel each breath I take, and soon I feel her start to copy me.

“That’s it, baby. Good girl. Just keep breathing.”

Finn scoots closer and noses his way under her arm so his head is resting on her stomach. She reaches a hand down and slowly strokes the dog’s head, and after a few minutes, I feel her body start to relax. I keep caressing her cheek with the pad of my thumb, grounding her in every way that I can.

When she’s calmed down enough to speak, she looks up at me with wide, scared eyes. Tears still fall down her cheeks, and her voice is still shaky when she says, “I thought it was over. I thought I was finally becoming free of him, but he’s still here, Matvey.” She starts crying harder again, and the sounds of her pain rip my fucking heart out. “He’s still here.”

“Alina, it is getting better, baby.”

“It’s not.”

She shakes her head as much as she can with my hand still cradling her cheek and her other one pressed against my bare chest.

“It is. You screamed tonight.”

“What?” Her brow furrows, but she keeps petting Finn’s head, waiting for me to explain.

“You screamed, baby. It’s the first time you’ve done that. You always scream silently during a night terror. Your mouth opens, and I can see the way your throat tenses, and I know you’re screaming like hell in your head, but no sound ever comes out, but not tonight.” I caress her cheek and smile down at her. “You screamed, *malishka*. You found your voice this time, and you let it out. Things are getting better, but he’s not going to disappear all at once. He’ll come back sometimes, and I will be here when he does.”

I lean closer and kiss her forehead. “I will *always* be here.”

Finn gives a soft whimper, and I swear it’s like he’s telling her that he’ll be here for her, too.

“Good boy,” she whispers, rubbing his head while I continue to rock her. After a few minutes, she breaks the silence. “I have such bad thoughts, Matvey.”

I stroke her cheek before running my thumb over her bottom lip. “Like what?”

“I think about killing them,” she admits. “Do you remember at the club when you held me and shot all those men?”

I think about that night, the rage that was inside me and how fucking good it had felt to hold her close while ending their lives. “Vividly, *malishka*.”

“I wish I had been holding the gun,” she whispers like she’s telling me a dark secret she’s ashamed of, and I hate that she’s feeling guilt over this.

“Look at me.” I run my thumb over her lips again, waiting for her to meet my eyes. When she does, I smile down at her. “That’s nothing to be ashamed of, Alina. I think it would be odd if you didn’t fantasize about killing all the bastards who are involved in this shit. Do you think I feel guilt over killing them?”

“No,” she whispers.

“No,” I agree, “and I never will. Killing them made me feel better. I knew it would never erase your pain, but I felt better knowing that at least some of them were paying for it.”

“I’m jealous. I wish I could’ve been the one to do it.”

I think about what she’s saying, and right now, holding her after a nightmare, it makes perfect sense. She needs to be in a position of control. She’s been the victim, she’s been the abused, and now she needs to be the one with the power, and before I can think better of it, I kiss her forehead and say, “I want you to come with me to the auction.”

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 13

Alina

I can't stop thinking about what Matvey said last night. He seemed just as surprised at saying it as I was at hearing it, and I've been waiting for him to say it was a mistake, that he's changed his mind and there's no way in hell I'm going tonight, but so far he hasn't taken it back. If anything, he seems more determined than ever to see this through.

Sitting on the bed with Finn, I pet his soft fur and watch Matvey get ready for tonight. He pulls on a pair of jeans and a black, long-sleeve tee. With those broad shoulders and all that muscle, Matvey looks deadly enough, but then he starts grabbing his weapons, and all I can do is stare as the man I love transforms into a one-man army. Knives are sheathed, guns are tucked away in an ankle holster that's hidden beneath his jeans and another at the small of his back, and finally he pulls on a black hoodie that hides it all.

I'm still watching him when he goes back into the closet and comes out holding some clothes for me. He holds out the black yoga pants and matching black thermal top.

"I'm sensing a theme here," I tell him.

"Yes, it's a *try to remain invisible* theme, and for you it's also a *stay glued to Matvey's ass* theme."

I laugh and scoot off the bed, giving his perfect, firm ass a smack when I'm next to him. "I can get behind a theme like that."

He laughs and sits on the edge of the bed. It's his turn to watch me while I change clothes, and he makes no attempt to hide what he's doing. His eyes run over me, taking in every inch until I'm standing in front of him in a head-to-toe, form-fitting outfit.

“You look like the sexiest cat burglar I’ve ever seen, but there’s just one thing missing.”

“What’s that?”

“This.” He holds up a black mask with cutouts for the eyes and mouth.

“A ski mask? Seriously?”

“Yes. If we’re doing this, then you’re going to have to face a lot of men, and they don’t get to look at you. I don’t care if the only glimpse of you they’re going to get is the two seconds before you put a bullet in their head. That’s two seconds too long.”

He grabs my hips and pulls me closer so I’m standing between his legs. I reach up and run my hands through his dark hair as he wraps his arms around me so our bodies are touching. With a groan, he brings his face to my neck and kisses the spot behind my ear that he knows drives me crazy.

“I won’t be able to tolerate them looking at you, *malishka*. They don’t get to see your face. They don’t deserve to die with your beautiful face being the last thing they see. That’s an honor they don’t deserve.”

I wrap my arms around his neck and hug him tightly. “Are you sure this will be okay? I don’t want to get in the way or anything.”

He pulls back enough so I can see his face, and the scowl he’s wearing makes me laugh. I kiss the tensed-up skin between his dark brows.

“You will never be in the way, Alina. I always want you with me. I’m not crazy about bringing you to the auction, but that’s just because I don’t want you anywhere near this shit. I’m also a little worried about how this might affect you.”

He turns his head to kiss the wrist that’s still healing. The stitches haven’t come out yet, and I’m no longer wearing a bandage, so it’s not a pretty sight.

“I don’t ever want to do something that makes things harder for you. Promise me you’ll tell me if it’s too much.” His dark eyes meet mine. “We don’t have to do this. *You* don’t have to do this.”

I smile and cup his face, leaning down so I can kiss him. “But I want to,” I whisper against his lips.

With one arm wrapped firmly around my waist and the other cupping the back of my head, he kisses me slowly, sucking my bottom lip into his mouth and pulling a groan from my body as he slides his tongue in to meet mine. Nothing else matters when Matvey’s mouth is on mine. He makes everything else fade away. I can’t even hear Konstantin’s taunts and cruel

words. With each day, his voice gets softer while Matvey's gets louder. Instead of *you're a pathetic whore who doesn't deserve to eat*, I hear *you're so beautiful, malishka, the most precious thing I've ever touched.*

Deepening the kiss, he pulls me into his lap so I'm straddling him. His hand gently fists my hair while he devours my mouth, turning me into a whimpering, shaking mess. I feel the hard length of him beneath me, and I can't resist grinding against it.

"Fuck," he growls, giving my lip a soft bite. "You have no idea what you do to me."

"The same thing you do to me, I'm guessing." I smile and slide my tongue between his lips, eager for one more taste. By the time we part, both of us are breathless, and we're both wanting more, and I can't for the life of me figure out why I'm holding back. I want Matvey. I've always wanted him, and I want to know what it's like to be with him, to be with someone that I want to be with instead of someone I was forced to be with.

"Matvey," I whisper. He hears the longing in my voice and groans. Wrapping me in a tighter hug, he kisses me once more, gentler and sweeter and so fucking perfect.

"I know, baby," he murmurs against my lips. "Soon, I promise."

I nod, staying in his lap while he hugs me and we both get ourselves under control. Finn is lying on his bed, chewing on a bone and pretending he's not watching our every move. In the short time we've had him, I've completely fallen in love with the German Shepherd, and I can't imagine not having him in our lives.

"You still want to do this?"

"Yes." I kiss him again and take a deep, steadying breath. "I'm ready."

The others are waiting for us in the kitchen, and when my brother sees me in my all-black outfit, he sighs and shakes his head.

"I can't say I'm a big fan of this idea."

I give my brother a hug. "I'll be fine. I'm not leaving Matvey's side, and you'll all be there with me." When he still doesn't look convinced, I say, "I need this, Roman. I can't keep going on like this. The therapy is great and Matvey's been amazing, but, I don't know." I shake my head and keep my voice low so only he can hear. "I need more. I need to feel like I'm in control of something again."

My brother's face softens as he pulls me in for another hug. "I get it, Alina. Believe me, I do, and I'll support whatever you feel you need to do."

“Thanks, big brother.”

He smiles and kisses my head before releasing me. “Always, little sis.”

“Looking good, Alina.” I turn my head to see Vitaly grinning at me. “You ready to kill some sick fucks?”

“I’m kind of jealous,” Emily says, rubbing her belly with a sigh.

“God, me too,” Simona says.

“Me three,” Jolene says from beside Lev.

Katya looks at Vitaly. “Yeah, we’ll just stay here and be pregnant, I guess.”

Vitaly laughs and kisses his wife’s cheek. “That’s my girl. You stay here and keep your beautiful ass safe, and I’ll make sure you’re always pregnant.”

She starts to say something, but he just kisses her into silence and smacks her ass. When he’s satisfied, he pulls back and looks over at us. “So, are we taking the minivan tonight?”

“You’re such a fucker,” Roman says with a laugh. “No, we’re not showing up tonight in front of Dominic and all his men in a fucking blue minivan.”

Vitaly turns to Lev. “I knew I should’ve gotten the green one.”

Lev laughs. “Yeah, that would’ve made all the difference.”

“All right, time to go,” Danil says, getting us all back on track.

While they say goodbye to their wives, a group of men arrive to watch the penthouse while we’re gone. I grab Matvey’s hand, excited to go with them instead of staying behind. Before we get into the elevator, Matvey gives a quick whistle and Finn comes running over, stopping at my side and looking up with a cute, excited look on his face.

“He’s coming with us?”

Matvey cups my cheek, studying me with his dark eyes. “What if you have a panic attack and you need him?” He reaches down and pets Finn’s head. “He needs to be with you, *malishka*. Plus, look at him.”

We both look down at the excited glint in Finn’s amber eyes. I can’t help but laugh at how damn happy he looks.

“He’d be so sad if we left him behind.”

He’s right. Finn loves being with us, and he’d hate to be left behind, so when we step into the elevator, we do it together—five heavily armed men, one highly trained dog, and me.

Instead of taking the minivan like Vitaly wants, we pile into one of the black SUVs. Matvey keeps my hand in his for the entire drive, rubbing the pad of his thumb along my skin in the way that I've come to crave and depend on. It's as comforting as Finn's head resting on my thigh, and I feel completely safe, squished in between these two.

When we get to the building where the auction is taking place, Lev parks us next to a black car with tinted windows.

Danil closes his laptop and looks back at us. "Everyone is here and waiting. All the men showed up, and no one suspected anything."

"So they have no idea what's going on?" I ask, looking over at the nondescript building that I would never in a million years suspect of housing a bidding war for trafficked women.

Matvey shakes his head. "Konstantin and Osip were always very careful to never show their faces to the clientele."

"When I came here for Simona's auction," Danil says, "I was led into a private viewing room that looked out onto the stage. I never saw any of the other men who were bidding. The only men I saw were those that were guarding the doors and the man who did the tattoos after the women were bought. All those men are dead now, and no one here will ever know that the men standing guard outside their doors are a part of our Bratva and not Konstantin's."

Roman laughs. "They were lead in by Melnikov men and willingly allowed themselves to be locked into a room."

"Men with money always think they're untouchable," Lev says, shaking his head. "Stupid fucks are just begging to be killed."

"Well, let's give 'em what they're begging for." Vitaly laughs and opens the door.

When Matvey and I step out with Finn, I see Dominic getting out of the black car next to us. If he's surprised to see me, he hides it well. He looks down at Finn and then gives me a slight nod.

"Joining in the fun tonight, Alina?"

"Matvey and I are trying a new therapy."

I see a faint hint of a smile in the dark before he says, "Funny, that's exactly what I'm trying." Turning to Danil, he asks, "Which room is he in?"

"He's number nineteen. Everyone's locked in their rooms. We'll be taking the others out and then setting the building on fire. We'll also be burning down the motel later, the one they use to house the women in

before bringing them here to be sold. There's no need to keep up the pretense any longer. Now it's time to send a message."

"We want this shit out of our city," Roman says.

Dominic gives a soft laugh. "Your city?"

Instead of puffing out chests and grabbing dicks, the men around me laugh. It's the carefree sound of dangerous men who have nothing to prove.

"I said *our,*" Roman says.

I catch a flash of Lev's lip ring as he smiles and bumps Dominic's shoulder. "Don't get all pissy."

Dominic raises a brow. "Pissy? You did not just fucking say that to me."

Lev laughs. "I most definitely did. You're included in the *our*. There's enough city for both our families."

"Just don't tell your dad we said that." Vitaly laughs and smacks Dominic on the back. "I don't know how it's possible, but the old man is immune to our charm."

"It's a true mystery," Dominic deadpans while eyeing the five tattooed Russian men in front of him.

"One that will obviously remain unsolved," Lev says with a laugh, scrubbing a tattooed hand over his jaw.

Danil looks over at the building. "Everyone ready?"

Dominic looks over at his men and gives a nod that's so soft I could've easily missed it, but it gets their attention. Within seconds, the large group splits, half go inside the building while the other half disappear into the shadows.

"What's going on?" I whisper to Matvey.

He turns me towards him and cups my face. Smiling, he gives me a quick kiss before lowering the ski mask onto my head until only my eyes and mouth are showing.

"They're going to join our men and keep the building secure for us," he tells me, cupping my masked face with a grin playing at his lips. "You look adorable in this, by the way." His eyes cut to the building before landing back on mine. "We're wiping them all out tonight."

"Not all of them." I reach up and grab onto his forearms, feeling the muscles move beneath my fingers when he runs his thumb over my lips. I kiss the scarred skin and grip him tighter. "There will still be two left."

"Don't worry about them, *malishka.* They're not going anywhere. I'll deal with them soon enough."

When I nod, he leans down and kisses me slowly. It's a kiss I could easily lose myself in, but we both know now isn't the time, so he pulls back with a soft groan.

"Ready, baby?"

Suddenly the nerves get to me and I start to doubt that I can do this. Watching a man get shot and actually being the one to pull the trigger are two very different things. "What if I can't do it?"

Matvey smiles like it's no big deal. He kisses me again and says, "Then I'll do it for you, baby. Either way, we're doing it together, just you and me."

"Just you and me," I repeat, making his smile grow even bigger.

He gives me a wink and one more quick kiss before wrapping an arm around me as we all make our way to the building in front of us. We're on a darkened side street, so there isn't any other traffic, and the sidewalks are empty. The men around me are all dressed in black, but I'm the only one wearing a mask. Finn is eager and alert. He watches everything, and I can tell he's curious, but he stays by my side, shooting me quick looks to make sure I'm okay.

Matvey's just as tense beside me, watching every corner and keeping me right next to him. As soon as we step through the front door, he pulls his gun and gives me another wink, looking every bit the dangerous, sexy badass he is.

Danil points to a set of elevators and the door right next to them that leads to the stairwell. "The two floors above us are where the viewing rooms are." He looks over at Dominic. "Everyone was frisked when they came in and all weapons and cell phones were taken. We told them new security measures were in place for their protection. None of the stupid fuckers questioned it." Danil points his finger up at the ceiling. "Your man is right above us, second to last door. "

Without a word, Dominic and his men head to the stairs, not even bothering to wait for the elevator. The dark, murderous look in Dominic's eyes reminds me that I'm surrounded by the city's most dangerous men, and the man I love is most definitely one of them. It's easy to forget who my family is because I don't see them as violent criminals. I see them as my brothers and the man I love. I see them as my family, and I'll never see them as anything other than that. I know the kind of men they are, and nothing could ever make me view them in a negative way.

Right above us are men who are just as powerful, but their power is the more accepted kind, the kind society doesn't frown upon because the men who wield it aren't covered in tattoos or piercings. Danil told me about some of the men here tonight, politicians and diplomats, wealthy sons of prominent men—people who look upstanding, but scratch the surface and you'll find the vilest of things beneath the perfect façade. Every single one of these men were drawn here tonight because they saw photos of trafficked and abused women who they were led to believe would be up for auction. They came here with one purpose and one purpose only—to buy a woman they can rape and abuse.

So fuck all of them.

"That's my girl."

I look up and see Matvey beaming down at me, dark eyes lit up with pride and a big smile on his gorgeous face because he can tell everything I'm thinking. With a laugh, he grabs my hand and leads me to the stairs while Roman yells out orders for the other men in their Bratva. I smile at the sight of my brother. He's a natural leader, they all are. I see the respect in their men's eyes, and it's so different from how Konstantin's men used to look at him. They served him out of fear and greed, but they never respected him or his brother. Respect isn't something that can be bought, and you can always tell what kind of leader a man is based on the respect you can or can't see in the men who rank below them. The enforcers in the Melnikov Bratva look at my brothers and Matvey with respect, and I know every single one of them would take a bullet for them without a second thought. That tells me everything I need to know about my family, and I'm proud as hell to call myself one of them.

I squeeze Matvey's hand as we take the stairs to the first level. On the way, we pass Dominic. Two of his men are dragging a man between them. There's a dark hood pulled over his face, and his wrists are zip-tied together. He must be gagged because he's letting out muffled screams that everyone is ignoring.

Lev laughs and smacks Dominic's shoulder as we pass by. "Have fun."

"I plan on it."

Even though he finally has the man who killed his sister, I recognize the look on his face. It's the same one Matvey gets when I catch him thinking about Konstantin. It's a mix of relief at finally having the bastard and anger at knowing it will never be enough.

We hit the second floor, and Matvey leads me out of the stairwell while Danil and Lev continue to the next floor with a group of men behind them. Roman and Vitaly step onto this floor with us, followed by five armed men. Finn's ears perk up as he sniffs the door in front of us. The hallway stretches out in front of us, closed doors lining the right side, Several armed men are already in the hall, and when they see Matvey, they start speaking Russian, telling him that all the doors are locked and that everything's been quiet. The men inside these rooms are evidently still clueless about what's really going on.

"Holler if you need me," Roman says, patting my head as he walks past me to one of the other doors.

"Have fun, little sis," Vitaly adds, squeezing my shoulder and shooting me a quick smile before walking down the hall to pick a room for himself.

Matvey cocks his gun and hands it to me, flicking the safety off at the last second. "Careful, *malishka*. All you need to do is pull the trigger."

I nod, and my breathing starts to pick up when I feel the weight of the gun in my hand. Finn gives a soft whine and leans his weight into my leg in a move that instantly comforts me while Matvey cups my cheek and kisses me gently.

"We do this together, *malishka*," he murmurs against my lips.

When he feels me nod, he grabs his other gun, the one hidden in his ankle holster and clicks the safety off before opening the door and revealing the man I'm about to kill.

He's surprisingly ordinary looking in his khaki pants and pale blue polo shirt. His thinning hair is cut short and light brown eyes stare at us through his glasses.

"What the hell is going on?" he shouts at us, jumping to his feet and then paling when he sees us. His eyes jump from Matvey's gun to my masked face and then finally the German Shepherd growling softly at my feet.

Matvey's gun is pointed at him while mine still hangs at my side. "Don't fucking move," he tells him when the man tries to take a step closer.

"There's been a misunderstanding," the guy says, giving a forced laugh and trying to turn on the charm. "My name is Grant Skyler, and I'm here on business. Maybe you've heard of me? I own a chain of hotels in America and the UK."

“And on the side you like to buy trafficked women,” Matvey says, shaking his head in disappointment. “Shame on you, Grant. That makes me never want to stay in one of your shitty hotels.”

Grant seems more offended by the shitty hotel comment than he does about the accusation of buying trafficked women. His face turns an unhealthy shade of red before he says, “I don’t buy trafficked women. I don’t know who the fuck you are, but you need to leave.”

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen.” Matvey walks over to the black chair in the center of the room and picks up the tablet sitting on the cushion. After a few taps, he holds up the screen, letting Grant get a good view of the bound woman filling the screen. Matvey keeps his eyes on the man as he taps the screen, scrolling through the photos. Each one shows the face of a terrified woman, bound and gagged, and after only a few I’m forced to look away.

Matvey sees my reaction and tosses the tablet back on the chair. In Russian he says, “They’re all okay, baby. We knew what flight they were coming in on. Our men took over, killed the men involved and they’re helping the women get back to their families. They’re all safe now.”

I look between Mr. Preppy in his polo shirt, the kind of man who would be invited into homes without a second thought, and Matvey, a man who’s covered in tattoos and scars, the kind of man that most people would slam the door on if they saw him coming and call the police.

I meet Matvey’s dark eyes and say in Russian, “I love you so fucking much.”

Men like Grant make me appreciate what I have all the more. He’s a jackass who buys women, and Matvey’s the kind of man who searched for me for two long years, burning the whole goddamn world down until he found me.

His dark eyes soften at my words. “I love you so fucking much, too, baby.”

Grant lets out a harsh laugh, but it’s cut off when Matvey turns his dark eyes on him. There’s no longer a hint of anything soft in those eyes. Everything about him has gone hard as steel, and Grant pales a bit at the sight.

“Something funny?” Matvey asks him.

“It’s going to be funny when your asses end up in prison for this.”

This time it’s Matvey’s turn to laugh, but this time it’s genuine. “This is going to come as a shock, Grant, so prepare yourself.” Matvey motions between the two of us. “We’re not going to prison.” He points his finger back at the man who’s trying very hard to not shit his perfectly pressed khakis. “And you’re going to die.”

“Help!” Grant starts yelling, refusing to believe this is the end of his fucked-up road. “Help me!”

“No one’s going to help,” Matvey tells him. “You’re all alone, and I want you to die knowing that you did this to yourself. No one forced you to come tonight.”

A loud gunshot echoes through the room, making Grant let out a whimper and take a step back.

Matvey smiles and cocks his head. “I guess the fun is starting.”

‘Please,” Grant begs. “I didn’t know. I swear I didn’t know what was going on.”

I watch him, amazed and disgusted. If I didn’t know any better, I might believe him. Perverted assholes can be so damn convincing when they want to be. Finn gives a warning growl when Grant turns his attention to me. I may have a mask on, but he can tell I’m a woman, and because of that, he thinks I’ll be the pushover.

“Please, don’t do this. I have a wife and kids. I swear I didn’t know what was going on. I was just told to be here tonight, that it was some sort of fundraiser to help people. Please, help me,” he begs, and I can’t help but laugh. The sex trafficker begging one of the victims for mercy. Oh, how things have fucking changed.

Matvey steps behind me, wrapping his arms around my upper chest before kissing my masked head while he keeps his eyes and gun trained on Grant.

“I’m not going to help you,” I tell him. “I’m going to shoot you.”

“Why? Why are you doing this?”

“Why?” The words comes out as a harsh yell, and the laugh that follows makes him second-guess looking to me for help. I sound as enraged as I feel. I raise my gun and point it at him. “Men like you took me and used me and held me prisoner. Men like you ruined my life and took everything from me.”

“Fuck,” he whispers, and it finally hits him how much trouble his ass is in. “I’m sorry. I can give you money. I can help.”

“Men like you always think you can throw money at a problem and make it go away. Fuck you, and fuck your goddamn money.”

Matvey rests his hand on my hip, giving me a comforting squeeze as he slips his own gun into the waistband of his jeans. He runs his hands up my body, pressing me tighter against him before bringing his hands to mine so we’re both holding the gun that’s trained on Grant.

“Easy, baby,” Matvey whispers. When Grant starts to stumble backwards, Matvey makes a *tsking* sound. “I wouldn’t move if I were you. My girl is a natural at most things, but this is her first time shooting someone.”

“So you just want me to stand here and make it easy for her?” he asks, looking at us both like we’ve lost our goddamn minds.

Matvey’s voice is calm, but the warning is there in the deep, raspy tone when he says, “I do, yes, or I can make you take your dick out and she can practice aiming at that. Hitting something so small will be a tough shot for a beginner, though, so you’d better brace yourself for one hell of a mess.”

Grant sways on his feet, seconds from passing out, but he still manages to take another step back. There’s nowhere for him to go, though, and we all know it.

“You’re doing great, *malishka*,” Matvey murmurs, switching back to Russian. “I’m so fucking proud of you.”

His hands are steady over mine, and when he slides one scarred finger over the one I have pressed to the trigger, I feel my body start to shake.

“Just you and me, baby. We’re doing this together.”

Grant’s started sobbing, but we both ignore him. I take a deep breath, breathing in Matvey’s scent and feeling his strong presence all around me.

“Ready?”

I look at the man in front of me, knowing that I’m about to end his life, but instead of regret, I feel a rage start to build within me. This bastard was going to buy a woman tonight, and then he was going to rape her and keep her against her will. I don’t know what his particular perversion is, if he would’ve beaten her or sodomized her or passed her around to his friends, but he wouldn’t be here in this room if he didn’t have something horrible planned for her.

“I hate you.” The words come out harsh and hissing, and once I start, I can’t stop. “I fucking hate men like you who think you can buy and sell and beat women. You treat us like we’re you’re property, like you have any

goddamn right to put your hands on us, and when you decide you've had enough, you toss us aside and buy someone else and start it all over again. Fuck you, Grant. I hope you rot in hell, you sick perverted fuck."

Matvey's finger stays on mine, but he's not the one who pulls the trigger. I do. The shot hits him in the chest, blood immediately pooling as Grant's shocked, wide eyes meet mine, and then I shoot him again and again and again. Each shot brings him closer to death while it makes me feel more and more alive.

His end is a new beginning for me, and when I stop shooting, Matvey turns my head and kisses me with a deep groan. I open my mouth to him, feeling the hard length of him against my ass. Adrenaline rushes through me, nearly making me lightheaded, but all I can think about is getting Matvey closer. I suck his tongue and rock my ass against him, pulling another groan from him as he rocks his hips, meeting my movements perfectly.

"Fuck," he growls against my lips. "Watching you take your power back, *malishka*, fuck." He gives a soft laugh and kisses me again. "That was the sexiest goddamn thing I've ever seen."

"I want to do another."

He pulls back so he can see me better. His dark eyes study me, not missing a thing, and when his lips curl up in a smile, I quickly return it.

"Anything you want, baby."

We step out of the room and straight into a beautifully orchestrated chaos. Gunshots ring out intermittently, and as I stare down the hall, I watch my brother leave one room before entering the next, gun drawn and a dark look on his face. Vitaly comes out of a different room, and he gives me a big smile and wave when he sees me before opening another room. Lev must've come back down to our floor because I watch him walk out of one of the rooms covered in blood with an equally deadly look on his face.

"He's not using a gun, is he?" I whisper to Matvey.

"Doesn't look like it." He gives a soft laugh. "We've waited a long time for this. Everyone wants to enjoy it to the fullest."

Several members of the Bratva filter down the hall, keeping an eye on everything while others slip out into the stairwell to check on things upstairs. The shots that ring out don't startle me. Instead, I find the sound oddly comforting. Every bullet that's fired means there's one less sex trafficker in the world.

Finn stays glued to my side as Matvey leads me to the next room. Before opening the door, he pulls his gun out and steps in front of me so I'm completely covered. Even in this, he's protecting me. He's giving me the freedom to get my revenge, but he's doing it in a way that guarantees no harm can come to me.

"Don't fucking move," Matvey growls, stepping into the small room with me right behind him.

He's heard the shots and knows something has gone very wrong with his evening, but that doesn't stop the smug grin from spreading across his clean-shaven face. He's wearing an expensive black suit, and when his eyes turn to me, he lets out a soft laugh.

"What the fuck is this about?"

When neither one of us says anything, he keeps talking.

"Let me guess, you want more money for the girls now." He shakes his head like this is an annoyance rather than anything that might actually cause him harm. "Fine, whatever. I'll pay whatever extra fee you want, but if I'm not satisfied with the product, this will be the last fucking auction I come to. I'll take my business somewhere else."

He's a lot easier to shoot than the last guy. Matvey doesn't even need to steady my hand when I aim the gun. The bullets hit his chest, and the shocked look he gives me sends a warmth through mine. I think about all the poor women I saw over the last two years, all the victims who will never get vengeance or justice of any kind, and I wish they could be here to share this moment with me, but they can't, so I put a couple of extra bullets in the fucker on their behalf.

When I'm satisfied, I lower my gun and pet Finn's head while I turn to look at Matvey. His dark eyes are filled with love, pride, and a pure, raw lust that threatens to undo me, because I feel it too. I want him so fucking badly, and I can feel that desire threatening to take over and consume me.

Before I throw myself in his arms, I smile at him and say, "More."

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 14

Matvey

F*uck me.*

I watch Alina shoot two more men before I lose all resolve and press my mouth to hers. I had no fucking clue watching her take her revenge would be so goddamn hot, but it is, and I'm so damn hard I can barely think.

As soon as our lips touch, she moans and opens her mouth to me. I slip the gun from her hand, tucking it away before pressing her against the wall. Deepening the kiss, I cup her face, and when that's not enough, I pull her mask off so I can feel her skin against mine.

Knowing I'm seconds away from losing control, I pull back, breathless and dazed, and meet Finn's amber eyes and point at the hall. "Guard the door, Finn."

He cocks his head, and then looks at Alina, and I swear he waits for her to nod before he trots over to the open door and parks his ass right in front of the doorway. Picking Alina up, I carry her to the wall that's behind the open door so she'll be hidden from view. There's no way in hell Finn will let anyone come in, but I'm not taking any chances of someone getting a peek at my girl, especially with what I'm about to do to her.

"Matvey," she whispers when I slip my fingers into her yoga pants and start to pull them down.

Cupping her bare ass, I pull her closer and nip at her bottom lip. "I need to taste you, *malishka*. Will you let me?"

Her eyes go heavy-lidded when I slide my hand around and cup her bare pussy. She's soaking wet and so fucking perfect.

"Will you let me make you come?"

I drag the pad of one finger over her swollen clit.

“I want to fill my mouth with the taste of you, and I want to do it here.”

Her eyes dart to the man lying on the floor, the man she just killed, before they meet mine again. The hunger in them is obvious, and it’s begging me to take care of her, to make it go away.

“Yes,” she whispers, rocking her hips when I graze her clit again.

“That’s my good girl.”

Her breath hitches at my praise, and when I start to kiss a line along her jaw, she closes her eyes and moans my name. I give her clit one last rub before lowering down to my knees in front of her. Sliding her pants down to mid-thigh, I groan at the sight of her. My poor girl is soaking wet and in desperate need of release.

Closing the distance, I press my face against her sweet cunt and fill my lungs with the scent that I’ll never be able to get enough of. Her hands run through my hair, gripping tightly when I run my tongue up her wet slit. Gunshots continue to go off, mixed with the occasional shout in Russian, but none of that matters now. The only thing I care about is getting as much of this beautiful pussy into my mouth as I can.

She whimpers when I slide my tongue into her, sucking and licking and devouring every goddamn inch of her. My fingers dig into her hips, and she gives a soft moan when I use my thumbs to spread her wider, allowing me better access to what I want. Her swollen clit is on full display. I look up at her as I stick my tongue out, giving her a firm lick.

“Fuck,” she moans, fisting my hair tighter while looking down at me.

She watches me lick and suck on her pussy, biting her lower lip to keep from screaming out.

“I could do this for hours,” I tell her in between soft licks on her clit. “I could bring you right to the brink of coming and then pull back, over and over again until your whole body is shaking and you can barely remember your own name.”

“Matvey,” she whimpers, already so desperate to come.

I give a soft laugh, letting her feel the heat of it against her delicate skin. “One day, baby, but right now we’re short on time.”

She lets out a relieved breath that makes me smile before giving her clit another kiss.

“So fucking beautiful,” I whisper, running my eyes over her splayed-open pussy. I drink in the sight of her for several more seconds before she

moans my name again, a desperate plea that I can't resist.

"Try not to scream when you come all over my face, *malishka*."

As soon as the words are out, I wrap my lips around her clit and give her a hard suck while sliding a finger into her. She bucks against me, letting out a strangled gasp as she fists my hair tight enough to sting and comes undone at my touch. Her inner walls squeeze my finger right before I feel her release hit my hand. With a groan, I give her clit another suck and then bury my face against her slit, lapping up her arousal like a fucking starving man. I lick and suck, filling my mouth with her while my thumb gently circles her overly sensitive clit, keeping the aftershocks going as her body starts to go limp and I feel her start to softly shake.

Gentling my movements, I slowly clean her, kissing and licking every inch of her because no way in hell am I letting one drop go to waste. I'm a greedy motherfucker when it comes to her, and I want it all.

She lets out another satisfied moan right before I hear the unmistakeable sound of Vitaly's laugh.

"Well, I know what that means," I hear him say before he laughs again, and then Lev's voice filters in.

"I'll make sure Roman doesn't come this way."

"Yeah." Vitaly laughs again and then says, "Awkward," in an exaggerated singsong tone that makes me laugh while Alina gives an embarrassed groan.

When I pull back and meet her eyes, she's beet red and sexy as hell. I give her pussy one last kiss and pull her pants back up. Standing, I cup her face and smile.

"Thank you."

She raises a brow at me.

"For letting me eat your pussy, *malishka*."

"I feel like I should be the one thanking you."

"You're wrong about that. Getting on my knees for you is a fucking privilege, and I'll never take it for granted. What you just let me do is a gift, baby, and anytime you want to give it to me, I'll gladly accept."

She cups my face and pulls me closer so she can kiss me. Tasting herself on my tongue, she moans and sucks me into her mouth, nearly making my cock bust out of my damn pants.

"You own every goddamn part of me, Alina," I whisper against her lips when she releases my tongue. "Every part of me belongs to you, and it

always will. No one else but you, *malishka*."

She whispers my name and kisses me again. "Take me home."

I know what she's asking, and when I pull back, her blue-green eyes are filled with love and desire. I search her face for any signs of hesitation or fear, but there isn't any, just the beautiful, carefree smile she used to always give me.

I smile back and give her another kiss before adjusting myself so I don't walk out in front of my men with an obvious erection. Picking up the ski mask I'd dropped earlier, I shove it in my back pocket. I haven't heard a gunshot in several minutes, so I'm guessing everyone's dead and there's no longer a need for the mask.

Grabbing her hand, I kiss the back of it before leading her out of the room. Finn is waiting in the exact same spot, and as soon as he sees Alina, his tail starts wagging. She laughs and pets his head, giving him a good scratch behind the ears while she praises him.

"Sounds like everything went well, Alina."

She lifts her head to see Vitaly leaning against the wall a few doors down, grinning at the two of us with a very amused glint in his eyes.

"She's a natural," I say, trying not to laugh at the embarrassed look on her face. "Killed four of the fuckers with zero help from me."

"You helped," Alina quickly says, giving me a sweet smile and squeezing my hand.

"It sure sounded like he did," Vitaly says, because the bastard just can't help himself. When he sees the warning look I give him, he raises a hand and lets out another laugh. "Okay, okay, I'll stop. I've just waited a really long time to be able to do this. Plus, I did buy the little black dress that forced you into action," he reminds me like there's a chance I could ever forget the sexy, black dress he gave Alina for her eighteenth birthday.

I look down at her and pull her closer so she's pressed against me. "It wasn't the dress that did it."

"No, but it sure as fuck helped," I hear Vitaly say before walking off to meet the others.

"He's right. It did help speed things up a bit. If it wasn't for that dress, it probably would've taken you years to make a move."

"It would not have taken me years," I tell her, leading her down the hall and back to the stairs. "You'd just turned eighteen that day. I hadn't even had a real chance to do anything."

She sighs and leans into me. “I guess we’ll never know.”

I give her ass a soft smack. “We do know, *malishka*. You were always going to be mine, and I would’ve made my move with or without the black dress.”

She smiles up at me and lets me lead her down the stairs. We pass several of our guys on the way, each one carrying cans of gasoline, and soon the smell is overwhelming. Alina squeezes me tighter, knowing what’s about to happen. We hurry up and get out of the stairwell, and once we’re outside, we both take in a big breath, clearing our lungs of the strong smell.

We cross the street and wait with the others by the SUV. Lev gives us a big smile and a small laugh, but he and Vitaly keep their comments to themselves since Roman is standing right next to Alina. I doubt he’d see the humor in it like they do.

Smoke starts to billow out of the top of the building, a thick, dark plume that quickly blankets the sky above. Our men hustle out of the main entrance right as we start to see flames erupt and fill the windows along the top floor. My body instinctively tenses at the sight and the familiar crackling sound that soon fills the air around us. Alina steps in front of me and presses her back and ass against me while grabbing my arms and wrapping them around her body so I’m hugging her from behind. She smiles up at me and kisses my cheek as soon as I’m close enough.

“The flames can’t get you anymore,” she whispers near my ear. “I won’t let them.”

I tighten my grip on her and smile. Alina’s been through so much, more than any one person should ever have to endure, but even after all that, I know she’d do anything to keep me safe. She’d risk everything for me, just like I would for her.

She kisses my cheek before looking back at the fire that’s now consuming the building in front of us. Her beautiful face is lit up from the flames, and even as far away as we are, I can still feel the heat from the fire on my skin. My fierce, little protector watches the inferno we’ve created with a smile on her face. Feeling me watching her, she turns her head to look at me.

“You’re the only person who could make a fire beautiful to me, *malishka*. The light from the flames is dancing across your face, and you have the same determined look in your eyes that you got when you were little and you kept sneaking out to visit me at the hospital.”

She smiles at the memory. “Roman eventually gave up trying to stop me. He knew there was nothing he could do to keep me from you. I couldn’t bear the thought of you being there all alone.” Squeezing my arms around her even tighter, she says, “I would never have stopped trying to get to you.”

“I know you wouldn’t have, baby.”

I kiss her cheek and watch the fire with her until we hear the faint sound of sirens in the distance.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” Roman says, opening the door to the SUV.

We follow him into the vehicle with Finn at Alina’s heels, driving away right as several fire trucks come racing down the street with their sirens wailing.

“Yeah, good luck putting that out,” Vitaly says with a laugh.

“There’s going to be a lot of perverts shitting themselves tonight when they hear about the fire.” Lev laughs and looks over at Danil. “Heard anything?”

Danil opens his laptop and starts typing. There’s enough light coming from his screen for me to catch a hint of the smile he’s wearing. “Everyone’s pulling out. There’s messages all over the dark web right now about something being off about this auction. No one’s been able to get in touch with any of the men involved, no money’s been transferred from accounts, and someone heard about the fire over a police scanner, so word is already spreading about it. Convincing everyone the Red Viper fire was an accident was difficult enough, but two more fires in one night? No fucking way. A lot of men involved in the Lebedev sex trafficking ring are dead, and there’s no hiding it anymore. They’re going to run like the fucking cowards they are. They’ll eventually set up a new network, but it’ll take them a while. We haven’t killed the monster, but we’ve managed to slow it down a bit.”

“I’m not sure it can be killed,” Alina says from beside me.

“There will always be men who prey on women.” I wrap my hand around hers and pull her closer. “But you will never be anywhere near them again.”

She thinks about what I’ve said and nods, but I can tell it’s worrying her. I know she wants to go out there and save all of them, but I won’t fucking allow that to happen. I’ll stand by her side and watch her shoot the

fucks that we've found, but no way in hell am I letting her go out there and put herself at risk to unearth more of them. Over my fucking dead body. I failed her once, and I'll be damned if I do it again.

Resting her head on my shoulder, I caress her hand and savor the faint taste of her pussy that still sits on my tongue. I relive the moment, going over every vivid detail, and when she feels me start to grow hard, she lets out a soft gasp and looks over at me. I smile and wink before leaning close so my lips are pressing against the shell of her ear and only she can hear me.

"I was just thinking about how badly I want to be smothered by your pussy again." I nip at her earlobe, smiling at the shiver I feel run through her. "I can still taste you on my tongue, *malishka*, and it's fucking delicious."

Her hand squeezes my thigh when I run my tongue behind her ear and kiss her neck.

"Soon, baby," I promise her, but it's just as much for me as it is for her. I've waited so long to be inside Alina. I've thought of it pretty much nonstop, dreamt about it, and jerked off to the fantasy more times than I can count, but I will never rush her, and as much as I want this, if I'm not a hundred percent convinced that she's ready, it's not going to happen. She'll be pissed, but no way in fuck am I risking her mental well-being just so I can get off. I'd never forgive myself if I ever do anything to make things worse for her.

When we're back in the parking garage, we all pile out and head for the elevator, but Vitaly surprises me by grabbing my arm and holding me back. Alina and Finn stop, looking back to see what's going on. Vitaly smiles and waves a hand at her.

"We'll be up in a second, Alina. I just need to talk to Matvey for a minute."

She raises a brow, curious about what he's up to, but when I smile at her, she gives Finn's head a pat and gets onto the elevator with the others. Once the doors close and I can no longer see her, I turn to Vitaly.

"What are you up to?"

Vitaly laughs, and even though we're getting damn close to thirty, I still see the fifteen-year-old smartass in the smile he gives me. I'm close to all my brothers, but it was Vitaly who heard me screaming the night of the fire, and he was the one who risked his life to get me out of it. I feel a stab of

guilt every time I see the scars it left on his hands, but he's never once made me feel bad about it. When I'd tried to apologize once, he'd shook his head and told me to shut the fuck up, and then he'd said girls love scars and it made him look like a badass. Nothing ever gets Vitaly down, not really anyway. He's the cheeriest motherfucker I know.

He scrubs a hand over his jaw and gives me a shit-eating grin. "I heard what was going on in that room tonight, and I saw how you couldn't keep your hands off one another on the drive back." He gives another laugh, and the amusement in his eyes makes me groan. "I thought maybe we should have a talk."

"Don't fucking say it." I shake my head and start walking to the elevator.

"Your first time is a big step, Matvey. Are you sure you know what you're doing?" He cocks a brow at me. "Would you like some pointers?"

"I can't believe you fucking held me back for this."

I swipe my keycard for the elevator and push the button repeatedly, even though I can see it's still on its way up. I'm stuck with Vitaly for the next few minutes, and he knows it. He leans against the wall, crossing his arms across his chest while he gives me his *I'm deep in thought* look.

"Are you nervous?"

I give him a very pointed look. "I'm not discussing this with you."

He laughs. "Well, I just want you to know that I'm here if you need me."

"That's incredibly kind of you, but I've got it covered."

He laughs at my tone and the look I'm giving him. When the damn doors finally open, I quickly step inside with Vitaly right on my heels. After I push the button and the doors slide shut, he nudges my shoulder with his.

"In all seriousness, I'm so fucking happy for you, brother."

I look over at him and nod. "Thanks."

He's giving me a genuine smile, not the smartass one he so often hides behind. "She's loved you for so goddamn long." He laughs and shakes his head. "You have no idea how many times she'd stay up late talking to me about you."

"When was this?"

"From like twelve on," he says, laughing again, "but it really picked up when she was seventeen. She probably thought she was being pretty damn

sly about it, but she was constantly trying to figure out if you were seeing anyone, if anyone was flirting with you, that kind of thing."

"You told her no, I'm guessing."

"Hell no, I told her you'd pretty much slept your way through Moscow." He laughs at my expression. "Of course I told her no. Even if it wasn't the truth, no way in hell was I going to break her heart like that. You two were made for each other, Matvey. I've never seen anything quite like it."

I smile at what he's said and at the image of a young Alina trying to pry information out of Vitaly in what must have been a painfully obvious way.

"I want lots of nieces and nephews when the time is right," he says, right before the doors open. "And I better be their favorite uncle."

He smiles and smacks my back, stepping off the elevator as soon as the doors open. His face lights up when he sees Katya. He pulls her close and kisses her while keeping one hand splayed out across her stomach. I never thought I'd see all my brothers married, but when I look around the room at their smiling faces, there's no denying that they're exactly where they should be and with the person they were always meant to be with.

"Everything okay?"

I look over at where Alina is standing and give her a wink. "It's perfect, baby." Taking her hand, I kiss the back of it and pull her towards the stairs. Finn trots along at her heels, and before we disappear from sight, I have just enough time to look up and see Vitaly and Lev, both of them giving me a thumbs-up with big smiles on their faces. I flip them off and smile back before disappearing from view. I know they're just teasing, and I realize this is my first time, but I'm sure as hell not some fumbling teenager who doesn't know what the fuck to do with my cock. Being a virgin doesn't mean I'm ignorant. I know Alina's body, and I know exactly what to do to make her scream my name and writhe beneath me. This woman has all my firsts, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

We step inside our room, and I shut the door while Finn flops down on his giant dog bed and starts chewing on one of his bones. Alina stands in front of me, worrying her bottom lip while her eyes run over me. I step closer and cup her face, tilting her up to me.

"We don't have to do anything," I remind her. "I don't ever want you to feel pressured to do something with me. I'm not going anywhere, *malishka*, no matter what."

“I want to do this.” She grabs the bottom of my shirt and tries to pull it off me, but I still her hands.

“Patience, baby,” I tell her and then laugh at the look she gives me. “I just want to take my weapons off first.”

That appeases her enough to take a step back. Her eyes run over me, watching my every move as I remove the guns and knives and set them aside. As soon as I’m weapon-free, she closes the distance and runs her hands up my shirt, dragging her fingers lightly over my scarred back. Threading my fingers in her hair, I tilt her face up, staring into the blue-green eyes that are as familiar to me as my own.

“I would wait forever for you, *malishka*.”

“I’m tired of waiting.”

I lean closer and ghost my lips over hers. “You were worth every second.” She feels me smile when I add, “Every painful hard-on and jerk-off session in the shower was worth it.”

She laughs but when I pull back, I see the pain in her eyes. Bringing her hands out from under my shirt, she cups my face, running her thumb over the stubble on my cheeks.

Her eyes look glassy when she whispers, “Thank you, Matvey.” I lift a brow and she says, “For waiting for me, for loving me.” She gives me a wobbly smile. “For rescuing me and for helping me get revenge.”

“You break my heart when you say things like that, like there’s a possibility I could’ve ever done anything else.” My hands slip through her hair, trailing down her back until I’m cupping her perfect ass and pulling her tighter against me. “Loving you is a part of me, Alina, so deeply embedded that I couldn’t survive without it. It’s like breathing or the beat of my heart.” I rest my forehead against hers. “It’s who I am, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. It’s you and me, baby, always, no matter what.”

She lets out a shaky breath when I start to kiss a line along her brow, slowly working my way down. Tears hit my lips right before the saltiness of them fills my mouth. I kiss and lick them away. We’ve both cried enough to last a lifetime, but not tonight.

“No more tears, *malishka*,” I whisper against her wet skin. “No more sadness, no more pain.” I slip a hand under her shirt, running my fingers along her delicate spine. “We’ve had enough to last a lifetime. No more. I want to make you feel good.”

She moans and rocks her hips. “You always make me feel good.”

I give her top lip a soft suck. “That’s all I want to do for the rest of my life. I’ll die a happy man if every day I get to wake up to your smiling face and hear you moan my name every night. That’s all I want.”

“That’s all I’ve ever wanted, Matvey.”

She starts to pull my shirt off, but before I step back, my fingers run down her spine again, hitting the dip in her lower back. Her exhale hits my lips, the heat of her breath sending a shiver down my own spine.

She tugs on my shirt again, and this time I let her pull it off. Her eyes run over me, and the hunger in them has my cock straining even harder against my jeans. Bringing her hands to my pants, she starts to unbutton them, but before she can get me naked, I still her hands. It’s her skin I want to see right now, and way too much of it is hidden from me.

Slipping my fingers under her shirt, I caress her silky soft skin and slowly peel her thermal off, leaving her in a black bra and yoga pants. Her nipples strain against the lace, begging me to wrap my mouth around them.

“You’re so beautiful,” I whisper, drinking in the sight of her.

A blush creeps up her chest when I start to slide her pants off, letting my fingers graze her skin the whole way down. Pulling her shoes off, I toss them aside and then strip her pants off. Her panties are just as soaked as they were the last time I saw them, and the memory of burying my face between her legs has me letting out a groan as I grab her ass and pull her closer, pressing my face against her wet panties. I kiss her through the lace, breathing in her intoxicating scent while she runs her hands through my hair and moans my name.

“Please,” she begs, and that one word has me standing, picking her up as I go. Her arms and legs wrap around me as her lips find mine. She kisses me like she’ll never be able to get enough, like she needs it more than her next breath, and like I’m the most important thing in the world to her. It’s the exact way I feel about her—my Alina, the woman I’d burn the whole world down for.

When I lay her on the bed, she gives my tongue a hard suck and slides her hands down my chest to unzip my pants. I break contact long enough to undress, and then my body is pressed against hers again, and I’m kissing her like I’ll never be able to stop. With her arms wrapped around my neck, I bring one hand down and hook my thumb under her panties, slowly sliding them down her hips. She lifts her ass for me, and when her panties are off, I unclasp her bra and slowly pull it off her.

Not wanting to miss a second of this moment, I pull back so I can look at her. Her naked body is enough to make everything stop inside me. I freeze in place, unable to even grasp onto a thought. All I can do is look at her as the love I feel for her overwhelms me. There were so many times over the last two years where I'd convinced myself that this moment would never happen, and now that it's here, it's almost too much.

I run my hand up her body and lean closer, kissing my way up her chest. "I'm terrified this is a dream," I admit, whispering the confession against her skin. "I'm scared to death I've finally lost my mind and snapped."

"I'm here." One of her hands cups the back of my head, fingers threading through my hair, while she grabs my other hand and puts it on her heart. "Do you feel that?"

Her heart flutters beneath my palm, a fast beat that mirrors my own racing heart.

"Yes." I kiss her left breast, feeling the beat beneath my lips. "I feel it."

"This is real, Matvey, and if it's not, then I hope like hell neither one of us ever wakes up again."

With a groan, I wrap my lips around her nipple and give a hard suck, filling my mouth with her and making her arch her back with a gasp. She tightens her grip on my hair and rocks her hips, running her hand over my back, reminding me with every caress that she's the only woman to touch me, the only woman I've ever allowed to touch me, and the only woman I'll ever want to touch me. There's no one else for me but her.

My tongue runs over her nipple, and when I give her another suck, she locks her legs around my back, trying like hell to pull me up to her. I smile against her breast and give her one more slow lick before kissing a line up her chest. Sucking and licking her skin, I carve a path to her neck, wanting to taste every damn inch of her.

She rocks her hips, moaning my name when I slide the head of my cock over her pussy. I'm coated in pre-cum, and she's fucking soaked. Her slippery pussy is pure fucking heaven against my cock, and all I want is to slide inside her, but first I cup her face and meet her eyes. The blue-green is even more vivid than usual, even if her eyes are glazed over and heavy-lidded at the moment. I run my eyes over her, memorizing every detail of the woman I love.

"Are you sure?"

“I’m sure.” She cups my face and smiles, and she looks so much like the old Alina, the one who used to steal my hoodies and sneak into my bedroom at night to fall asleep in my arms, that it takes my damn breath away.

“I love you so much, Alina.”

“I love you too, Matvey,” she whispers back, pulling me closer so she can kiss me again. Everything else disappears except the feel and taste of Alina. Her body molds to mine, and the way she keeps grinding her pussy against me is making me fucking feral. Pressing the head of my cock against her slit, I suck her tongue, but I don’t enter her. I stay pressed against her soft, soaking wet lips, giving her plenty of time to tell me to stop. She’s been through too goddamn much for me to just slam into her. The last thing I want is for her to regret anything we do together.

She opens her mouth with a whimper, kissing me deeper while her body tightens around me. When she digs her heels into my ass, trying to push me into her, I smile against her lips.

“Please.”

The ragged, one-word plea is all I need, and with an excruciating slowness that surprises even myself, I finally slide into Alina. The wet heat of her envelops me, pulling a deep groan from my body and a sexy whimper from hers. So many times I’ve fantasized about this, but nothing could ever compare to the tight, wet heat wrapped around my cock or the feel of Alina’s body molded tightly against mine.

“Goddamn,” I growl against her lips when I’m fully buried inside her. I’m as close to her as humanly possible, but it still doesn’t feel like enough. I cup the back of her head and slide my hand under her ass, squeezing one cheek and arching her up so I can slide in even deeper.

“Matvey.”

The breathy sound of her voice as she says my name nearly sends me over the edge.

“I’ve got you, *malishka*,” I whisper against her lips. “I’ve always got you.”

With my fingers digging gently into one perfect, round ass cheek, I slowly start to move my hips, fucking her in a slow, languid rhythm that is completely at odds with how feral I feel. Cupping her face with my other hand, I caress her cheek with my thumb, letting her feel my scars so it can

ground her, a constant reminder of who she's with. I don't want anyone else in her head but me.

She kisses me so damn sweetly while her hips rock up to meet my thrusts, and I completely lose myself in her. When I circle my hips, hitting her right where she needs me to, she moans my name so goddamn sweetly right as her body tenses and she lets go. Her pussy grips me hard, forcing me to use every ounce of willpower I possess to keep from joining her. I'm not ready for our first time to be over just yet, though, so I hold back, watching the pleasure consume her and knowing I'll never see anything as beautiful as Alina coming all over my cock.

"So fucking beautiful," I whisper against her lips, kissing her through the aftershocks. Her body trembles beneath mine, and when she opens her eyes, she gives me the cutest smile. It's the perfect mix of completely satisfied and still hungry for more, but beneath all that is the love she feels for me, and it makes me feel like the luckiest man alive.

Rocking her hips up, she lets out another sexy moan and runs her fingers along my back. I recognize the gluttonous look that soon fills her eyes. It's nearly identical to the look she'd given me earlier when she'd gone on her little killing spree, and I'm not at all surprised when she parts her lips and whispers, "More."

She's a woman of many appetites, and I'm more than happy to satisfy all of them.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 15

Alina

Matvey's sexy smile has my pussy clenching even tighter around him. He lets out a deep groan and rocks his hips, hitting all the hidden nerve endings inside me that I never even knew existed until this moment. Sex has been pain for me—pain and humiliation and fear. It's never been sweet or loving or felt good. A part of me was terrified that sex would never feel good for me, that I'd been damaged too deeply or broken to the point where I could never enjoy this kind of intimacy, but the second Matvey cupped my cheek, stroking my skin with the pad of his thumb as he slowly slid into me, being so careful to not cause me pain as he spread me wider than I've ever been, I knew this was different. The bliss that runs through me is only because of him and his love for me, and now I can't get enough.

His lips find mine, kissing me in a way that steals the breath from my lungs and makes it impossible to think about anything except the pleasure he's giving me. I'm not haunted by old memories because Matvey refuses to let them take hold. Every thrust of his large cock, every swipe of his tongue against mine, and every deep groan I pull from this gorgeous man reminds me that I'm exactly where I was always supposed to be and that nothing else will ever be allowed to come between us again.

Grabbing my leg, he grips the back of my thigh, putting my knee at my chest and allowing him to sink in even deeper.

"Fuck," I gasp, eyes rolling back in pleasure as I cling to him and moan his name.

This may be his first time, but Matvey is no timid virgin. Bracing his other hand on the bed, he lifts up enough to give me one hell of a view. The

hard lines of his muscles glisten with sweat, and each thrust of his hips makes his abs flex even more. Mesmerized by the sight, I run my fingers down his beautiful body. Flames decorate his skin, and mixed in are so many images of death. There are a few skulls and a flock of ravens that cover his side so it looks like they're about to take flight across his chest—black, intelligent eyes and wings spread—the delicate precision of each bird a work of art that I could easily lose myself in, and on his right bicep is the familiar cloaked image of Death himself. The skeletal face is hidden, but there's just enough showing to give a glimpse of a wicked grin. So much pain is written on his body, and when I run my fingers over my name, I realize it's the only spot of hope on him, the one thing he was clinging to.

"You make all the bad disappear," he growls from above, thrusting into me even harder. I know he's holding back, trying to go easy on me, because even now, even with him buried inside me, he's still protecting me. "My body is covered in pain, but you make me forget everything except the good, *malishka*."

I drag my fingers up the body I'll never be able to get enough of and cup his face. Pulling him down to me again, I smile and run my tongue along the seam of his lips, but before I dip inside to taste him, I say, "You make all the bad go away, too, Matvey."

Even as he thrusts harder into me, his eyes soften at my words while his thumb runs down my cheek.

"I never thought I'd feel safe again, but I do when I'm with you."

He smiles against my lips and whispers, "You're mine, Alina. You've always been mine and you always will be. I fucked up once, but I promise it will never happen again. You're safe with me, *malishka*. Always."

The scarred pad of his thumb drags down my skin, driving me fucking crazy as he kisses me hard and slams into me again.

"Now be a good girl and come all over my cock again. I'm barely hanging on, and I don't know how much longer I can last, but there's no way in fuck I'm coming without you."

"Fuck," I whimper before he slides his tongue between my lips again and circles his hips in a way that lights my entire body on fire. Every thrust has his cock hitting exactly where I need him to. The tension builds deep inside me, threatening to consume me until there's nothing left, and I gladly welcome it. Every part of me is already Matvey's. He owns me body and soul, and when he feels me arch off the bed and my pussy clench around

him even tighter as the pleasure rips through me, overwhelming and all-consuming and so fucking perfect, he lets out a deep, masculine groan before I feel him pulse inside me. He gives a few more hard thrusts, keeping his hand gently cupping my face and his thumb caressing my skin as he kisses me so damn sweetly. Even after he's empty and our bodies have stilled, he keeps kissing me and stroking my cheek, slowly growing soft inside me.

"I don't ever want to leave." He whispers the words against my lips in between kisses. "I want to stay right here, buried inside you for the rest of my life. I don't ever want to be separated from you."

I wrap my legs back around him and run my fingers through his hair, cupping the back of his head while my other hand dances along his spine.

"Fine with me," I murmur against his lips.

I feel him smile before he kisses me again. The moment is so perfect, everything I wish my first time could've been, and once that thought enters my head, I can't help but compare it to how I really lost my virginity. Matvey notices the change in me, and when he lifts his head up, he strokes my cheek and gently shakes his head before softly tapping my forehead.

"Don't go there, baby." His raspy voice is whisper soft as he looks into my eyes. "I was your first in every way that counts. As far as I'm concerned, we both just lost our virginity."

My eyes fill, but I try to blink the tears away as I tighten my grip on him. "I want you to know that I would've waited forever for you. I never would've touched another man or let them touch me if I'd had a choice. No matter how long we were separated, I would've waited for you and kept myself just for you."

"I know, *malishka*, and I'm so fucking sorry that choice was ripped from you in the worst way possible."

He brushes aside my tears while I try to get myself under control. When I can speak again, I say, "I know it's selfish, but I'm so glad you waited for me. Thank you for saving this part of yourself for just me, Matvey."

"Baby, every part of me is just for you, and I could never have been with anyone else. It wouldn't have been physically possible." He gives a soft laugh and shrugs his broad shoulders. "You're the only woman who gets me hard."

I find that nearly impossible to believe, and evidently he sees the doubt written all over my face, because he kisses me and says, "It's true,

malishka. I gave every part of myself to you the night you turned eighteen and I tasted you for the first time. Sex is more to me than just a quick fuck or a way to get off. I need more. I can't open myself up like that to anyone but you, and I wouldn't ever want to."

He gives me one more kiss before slowly sliding out of me so he can lay on his side next to me. His fingers run up my body, lightly dancing over my stomach and breasts like he's memorizing every detail of this moment.

"What happens now?" I whisper, watching him run his finger over my nipple. As satisfied as my body is right now, his touch is quickly sparking it back to life.

The corner of his mouth lifts in a sexy grin. "Well, we're going to do that again as soon as possible."

I laugh and brush back the dark strands of his hair, trailing my fingers down his stubbled cheek and sculpted jawline. "I was thinking more long term."

He smiles and drags his finger along my collarbone. "I'm going to marry you and love you and take care of you for the rest of our lives."

"What about a family?" I force the words from my too-dry mouth. "I know we talked about this earlier, but has this changed things?" I've been doing better, but I know there's no way I'm ready to jump into having babies. I can't even trust that I'll make it through the night without screaming and scaring the hell out of everyone. No way can I bring a baby into this mess right now.

Matvey smiles and drags his fingers to my stomach, tracing large circles onto my skin. "We have all the time in the world, *malishka*. I would love nothing more than to have a family with you, to see your beautiful body swollen with our baby, but if you're never ready for that, then we won't. We'll surround ourselves with our nieces and nephews and spoil them rotten."

"And you'd be okay with that?"

"I'm okay with anything as long as you're with me." He leans down to kiss me, splaying his hand across my stomach. "You're all I need. You're the one I can't live without. If you decide one day that you're ready to start a family, I'll be so fucking happy. If you decide it's not what you want, but I still get to have you by my side, I'll be so fucking happy."

I smile up at him and kiss him again. "I knew there was a reason I love you so damn much. Even as a kid, I knew you were perfect."

He laughs and shakes his head. “Only you would think I was perfect as a teenager.”

“You were,” I insist, “and you still are.” I run my fingers over the scars on his shoulder. “You’re a good man, Matvey. I don’t care about the Bratva. I don’t care about any of the illegal shit you do. I know you, and you’re a good man.”

He never talks about his mom and sister, but I know he’s thinking of them when I see pain and grief fill his dark eyes.

“I’m not, Alina. I couldn’t save them, and I didn’t save you fast enough.”

The guilt and sadness in his voice has me wrapping my arms around him and pulling him in for a hug.

“No one could’ve saved them, Matvey, but even knowing that you still tried to and almost died because of it, and I don’t care how long it took you to save me. You did it. You never stopped looking, and you never would have. You don’t have to believe me. I know you’re a good man, and I’ll believe it enough for the both of us. There’s no one better than you. I knew it then, and I know it now, and you’ll never convince me otherwise.”

“You always were a stubborn little thing,” he murmurs against my neck, making me laugh.

“I am when it comes to people I care about, and I love you more than anyone, Matvey.”

“I love you more than anyone, *malishka*.”

He kisses his way to my mouth, and when I feel him grow hard against my stomach, I smile against his lips and rock my hips up in invitation. I’m still smiling when he slides into me again. Being with Matvey feels like coming home, like I have everything I could ever need or want, and I savor every second of it.

Our bodies stay locked together for hours, and when I’m so tired I can’t keep my eyes open or muster up the strength to even lift my arm, I hear Matvey’s deep laugh before he kisses me and wraps his body around mine, spooning me so I’m completely cocooned in the heat and scent of him as I drift into an exhausted sleep.

I could’ve slept for days, but someone banging on our door jolts me from the deep sleep way before I’m ready to leave it.

“What’s wrong?” Matvey yells, sounding just as tired as I feel.

“Emily’s gone into labor!”

We both sit upright at Danil's words, sleep immediately forgotten.

"Is she okay?" I holler, scrambling out of bed and frantically looking for some clothes.

"She's fine. Contractions are coming fast, though, and Roman's freaking out. They're leaving for the hospital now."

Matvey pulls on a pair of jeans and tosses me a pair of panties. "Tell him we'll be right behind him."

Danil walks off while I run to the bathroom to brush my teeth and pee. My reflection makes me wish I had time for a shower, but I can't bring myself to take the time to do it. I want to be there for my brother, so I run a brush through my hair and pull it into a quick ponytail right as Matvey walks in, looking way too damn gorgeous for just having woken up after a night of sex and a couple of hours of sleep.

"So not fair," I grumble, pulling on a pair of jeans.

He gives me a wink and grabs his toothbrush, running his dark eyes over me as I put on a bra and go in search of a shirt. I pull on a long-sleeve tee and grab a hoodie because it's really fucking cold outside. I've just put it on when Matvey comes out of the bathroom. He pulls me in for a hug, giving me a huge smile.

"Ready to meet your nephew, *malishka*?"

I beam up at him as it fully hits me that we're going to be meeting our nephew today. My brother's going to be a daddy, and soon I'm going to be holding his son. I laugh when Matvey picks me up, cupping my ass in his large hands when I wrap my arms and legs around him. With our heads only inches apart, he searches my face.

"You feel okay?"

I know he's asking about more than just whether or not I've woken up with an ache between my legs. I have. He's huge and I'm sore, but it's the good kind of sore, the kind of ache that feels nice. It reminds me of what we shared, and I can't help but smile when I think about it.

"I feel great," I tell him, clasping my hands behind his neck and kissing him again. "I'm a little sore, but you're huge, Matvey, so I was expecting that."

His adorable smile has me laughing again. I rest my forehead against his and play with the hair at the nape of his neck.

"I'm fine," I whisper, knowing he's not going to be satisfied until he hears it. "I promise. Last night was perfect, and I've never been happier."

“It was perfect.” He kisses me slowly, savoring the moment. “And I’ve never been happier either.” He gives my ass a soft smack. “Let’s go meet our nephew, baby.”

I give him one more kiss before he sets me down. Finn’s waiting with his head cocked, wondering what the hell all the excitement is about. I give him a good pet and then grab his working vest so he’ll be able to stay with me.

“I’ll take him out on the rooftop before we go.” Matvey grabs his leash before the three of us head up the stairs.

“Can you believe it?” Vitaly’s beaming face is the first thing we see when we walk into the kitchen. “You should’ve seen Roman’s face when he scurried her through the apartment.” Vitaly laughs. “I’ve never seen him look so pale.”

“Keep laughing,” Danil tells him while Matvey walks past to let Finn out. “I’ll be sure and get a photo of your face when Katya goes into labor. Let’s see how calm you look when she’s bent over with contractions and looking like she’s about to pass out.”

Vitaly’s smug grin falls. “Yeah, I’m gonna stop making fun of him.”

Danil laughs. “Look at you making wise decisions.” He turns to me and smiles. “Did you ever think you’d see the day?”

I laugh and shake my head. “Never.”

Vitaly tries to look offended and fails. When Matvey comes back in with Finn, I see the smug grin appear again. He looks at Matvey and elbows Danil, giving a soft laugh. “Does Matvey appear older to you today?”

“Don’t start,” Matvey warns him while I look between them, trying to figure out what the hell is going on.

“He does,” Danil muses, smiling just as big. “It’s like our little brother just grew up over night and became a man.”

Matvey groans while they laugh and my face turns red. “Oh my god,” I groan, shaking my head at them. “Just stop.”

“I don’t think I can,” Vitaly says, “but you are in luck because Emily went into labor, and that’s going to be a big distraction.” He looks at me and feigns annoyance. “The girl never could stay in the background, always has to be the center of attention and all that. Of all the days to go into labor, she has to do it the morning after Matvey loses his—”

“Oh no, did you lose something?”

We all turn to see Katya standing in the hall with Simona. They're carrying a few bags and Katya's holding a pillow and blanket, waiting for an answer.

"Um, yeah," Vitaly says, trying to backtrack before Matvey kills him but also unable to lie to his wife, "but it's okay." He can't help but give another laugh. "He was more than ready to get rid of it."

"You are such a jackass," Matvey mutters, but I can tell he's not really mad. He wraps an arm around me and kisses the top of my head while Danil runs over to get the bags they're carrying, clearly not pleased that either one of them attempted to carry anything at all, even if it wasn't heavy.

"Lev and Jolene went with them?" I walk over to pour some coffee into a couple of to-go mugs. Matvey takes the one I offer him, giving me a grateful smile before taking a big drink. We're both exhausted, but the wink he gives me over the rim of his mug makes it clear he's not complaining.

"Yeah, Lev drove them. Jolene just texted and said they're at the hospital and Roman's already managed to scare several people. Apparently, they didn't get Emily into a room as quickly as he'd like." Danil laughs and puts his phone away. "Everyone ready?"

Simona smiles up at him. "I'm so ready. I can't wait to meet him."

Danil smiles and rests his hand on her very pregnant belly. "It's our turn next, *sladkaya*."

She puts her hand over his, and I swear the pregnancy glow she has going on right now could light the damn city.

"Just don't pop that kid out today," Vitaly tells her. "We can only handle one crazy Melnikov brother at a time. Roman's already called dibs on today."

She laughs and promises she won't be popping out any babies today while Danil shakes his head at his brother and starts carrying the bags to the elevator. We all get bundled up and then load everything into one of the SUVs. Instead of getting in with us, Vitaly grins and leads Katya over to the minivan.

"What are you up to?" Matvey asks him.

Vitaly grins even bigger. "Lev drove them, so I'm going to be a good brother and make sure Roman has a way to drive his new family home. I'm going to leave this bad boy in the hospital's parking garage for him."

He’s still laughing about his plan when he opens the door and helps Katya in.

“Roman’s going to kill him,” I mutter, getting into the SUV while the others laugh and watch Vitaly drive off. He honks and waves as he goes by, a huge smile on his face and a devilish glint in his eyes. Squished in the backseat between Matvey and Finn, I smile and let out another laugh. This hospital isn’t going to know what hit it. There’s no way in hell we’re going to blend in.

Matvey keeps his hand on my thigh, squeezing me gently while Danil drives us to the hospital. Once we’re parked next to the blue minivan, we all pile out while Vitaly laughs and lovingly pats the hood.

“I don’t know why Roman is so resistant. This baby drives like a dream.” He looks over at Katya. “Was that not the smoothest ride ever, *ptichka*? Tell me those plush seats didn’t feel amazing on your ass?”

She laughs at her husband. “I’m not gonna lie, it was pretty comfortable.”

“I know, right?” Vitaly laughs, wrapping his arm around her. “I mean, I’m not gonna run right out and buy another one, but there was a substantial amount of leg room, and it did offer some undercover protection. No one we passed was looking over at me and thinking, now there’s a tough guy who runs a Bratva.”

“You should definitely get one for yourself,” Danil tells him.

Vitaly thinks for a second and then shakes his head. “I don’t know, man. It was comfy, but as soon as I sat down, my dick shriveled up. It was a little unnerving. I really like the idea of you guys driving one, but me? Not so much.”

We’re all still laughing at Vitaly’s inability to get hard in a minivan when we walk in the main entrance. With our large group and the bags of baby things and extra blankets and pillows, we look like we’re ready to make camp and stay for a while. The poor woman at the front desk doesn’t know what to make of us. The surprised look stays glued to her face while she takes us all in. The thick tortoiseshell glasses she’s wearing make her eyes look even bigger, and when she sees Simona’s pregnant belly, she asks, “Are you in labor?”

“No, she’s not,” Danil says, leaning against the counter. “Our sister-in-law is, though. Her name’s Emily Melnikov.”

As soon as she hears the last name, she huffs out a small grunt and sits up a bit straighter. “They came through not long ago.”

Vitaly laughs. “Did our brother make a scene?” He gives the woman a big smile. “He’s always doing that. We can’t take him anywhere.”

Even though the woman behind the desk is old enough to be Vitaly’s mom, it doesn’t stop her from blushing at his attention and giving him a small smile as she quickly decides that she’s not all that pissed after all.

“Sometimes first-time daddies can be a lot to handle.” She says it like it’s a secret she’s admitting to just Vitaly, since she’s evidently forgotten about the rest of us.

Vitaly laughs and smiles even bigger. “Think you could sign us in so we can go up and check on him? I’d hate to think he’s yelling at some other poor woman who’s just trying to do her job.”

Matvey digs his fingers gently into my side as he gives a soft laugh that only I can hear. I look over and see Danil roll his eyes at me. The three of us have seen Vitaly sweet talk his way into something way more times than I can count. I have to give him credit, though, because it never fails. Now is no different, and I’m not at all surprised when she starts grabbing enough visitor badges for all of us.

Matvey’s the last one, and as soon as it’s in his hand, she spots Finn and starts shaking her head. “No, I’m sorry, you can’t bring him in here.”

Matvey looks down at Finn, who’s sitting proud in his harness and looking adorable. “He’s a service dog.”

“He’s not allowed,” she insists, looking at Finn like he’s carrying all sorts of pathogens and everyone in the hospital will surely die if she lets him through.

I feel Matvey’s body tense, and his voice is even harder than usual when he says, “My fiancée needs him.”

She looks from Finn to me, and the annoyed look on her face makes it clear she’s blaming me for all this. “Well, I’m sorry, but I don’t care. That dog’s not coming in here. This is a private hospital, and I can’t have some mutt running through the halls.”

The look on the woman’s face makes it clear that it’s not only our dog that she thinks doesn’t belong here.

Matvey’s hand rests on the nape of my neck as his thumb gently caresses my skin and Vitaly whispers a quick, “Fucking hell,” before

Matvey looks at the woman and says, “That mutt’s name is Finn and he’s highly trained and I’m guessing a hell of a lot smarter than you.”

Danil lets out a soft laugh while Matvey steps closer, making a show of reading her name tag before resting an arm on the counter. She eyes the tattooed hand in front of her and then the inked skin of his neck before meeting the hard look he’s giving her. His thumb continues to gently caress my skin, reassuring me that everything is okay.

“Christine, my brother is becoming a dad today, and we all want to be there for it. Finn is a part of this family, and he’s coming with us.”

When she starts to open her mouth to protest, he wags his finger at her. “Don’t interrupt me, Christine, we’re just getting to the good part. Do you see this beautiful woman standing next to me?”

Christine looks over at me, and I give her an awkward smile and an even more awkward wave while Vitaly coughs out a laugh.

“I love this woman more than life itself,” Matvey tells her, “and she needs Finn, so end of story as far as I’m concerned.”

When Christine still doesn’t seem convinced by his speech, he leans in closer and says, “Now you’re just pissing me off. I don’t like your attitude, and you’re about to have my foot up your ass and a giant fucking lawsuit, in that order, if you don’t let us through.”

Her eyes widen and her face turns an angry red, but she seems to finally understand that this is happening whether she wants it to or not. In our defense, Finn is a registered service dog and has every right to stay with me, no matter where I go.

Matvey smiles and holds out his hand to her. “One more visitor pass, please.”

Christine hands it over with a very pinched look on her face. While Matvey clips the badge to Finn’s harness, Vitaly gives the woman a cheery grin. “Thanks so much, Christine. You’re the best.”

Not even Vitaly’s charm is going to work this time, though. She just frowns at all of us, watching us walk past, no doubt thrilled to not have to deal with us anymore.

“Wow,” Simona whispers when we get to the elevators. “What a grump.”

Katya laughs and looks up at her husband. “Not even your charm was working.”

He cups her ass and pulls her closer. “My charm was working just fine, *ptichka*.” He juts his chin out at Matvey. “He scared her off.”

Matvey grins. “I did.”

I reach down and pet Finn. He licks my hand and gives me those cute puppy-dog eyes. “Did you see the way she looked at Finn? She deserved it. How could anybody not fall in love with him?”

“I agree,” Simona says. “He’s adorable.”

Finn looks up at us, knowing we’re talking about him. He wags his tail, looking every bit the professional with his harness and visitor’s tag.

I’m still smiling down at him when the elevator opens and we all step in. When we’re on the right floor, we get a few funny looks from the staff and the other visitors, but we finally find our way to the maternity ward where a much kinder woman lets us know what room Emily’s in. After knocking softly, Roman opens the door, looking equal parts terrified and excited.

I quickly wrap my arms around him for a big hug. “I’m so happy for you,” I whisper.

He squeezes me tightly and gives a soft laugh. “We wanted you to be here for this so badly, Alina. As soon as we found out Emily was pregnant, we all knew we had to get you back before the birth.”

When he pulls back, there are tears in my eyes, and I’m trying like hell to keep it together. He cups my face and kisses my forehead before his brothers swarm him to offer congratulations and smack him on the back like he’s the one about to push their baby into the world. With a laugh, I smile at Emily and walk over to the hospital bed she’s lying in.

“How are you holding up?”

“Much better now that Roman insisted they give me an epidural.”

She squeezes my hand and smiles. I can see the excitement in her eyes, but there’s also a bit of fear. I remember how she’d insisted on coming with me for my examination with Dr. Bianchi, how she’d refused to let me go through that alone, and I’m more than happy to return the favor now. I sit on the edge of her bed and give her hand a squeeze.

“You’re going to do great.” I rest my hand on her stomach. “I can’t believe we’re about to meet him. He’s damn lucky to have you,” I tell her, and then look at my smiling brother. “They both are. You’re going to be an amazing mom.”

Her eyes are glassy when she squeezes my hand. “And you’re going to be an amazing aunt. We’re so happy you’re here for this. It means everything to Roman, to *us*, to have you here.”

“Hey, no crying yet,” Roman says, walking over to us. He kisses Emily and rests his hand on top of ours, laughing when we feel his son give a hard kick.

“He really wants out,” Emily says and then sucks in a quick breath when another contraction hits.

“It still hurts, *solnishka*?” The fear in Roman’s voice has her smiling at him so he won’t worry.

“The epidural takes the edge off, but I’m not sure there’s a way to make it completely pain free. I’m okay, though. I promise.” She grabs his hand and kisses it.

He leans in close to her, cupping her face. “I’m so proud of you.”

“I haven’t done anything yet,” she says with a laugh.

“Yes, you have.” The look of pure love in his eyes has mine welling up again. I stand to give them some privacy, not at all surprised to immediately feel Matvey’s arms around me, pulling me in for a hug.

“You okay?”

I nod and take a shaky breath. “I’m just really happy.”

“Me too, baby.”

He’s still holding me when a nurse walks in. She eyes our large group of pregnant women, tattooed men, and one German Shepherd and gives a soft laugh.

“I can see you’re all excited about the newest addition to the family.” She walks over to Emily and eyes the equipment that she’s connected to. “Your contractions are coming fast.”

“Is everything okay?” Roman quickly asks.

“She’s fine, Mr. Melnikov. The labor is just progressing very quickly. Nothing to worry about, though.” Switching fully into nurse mode, she looks back at us. “I need to examine Mrs. Melnikov. The waiting room is down the hall. Someone will come and give you an update soon.”

We leave the room, wishing them both good luck and making way more noise than we probably should before heading down the hall and into the waiting room. Thankfully, it’s empty so we have the place to ourselves. Matvey sits and pulls me into his lap, kissing my cheek and smiling.

“I can’t wait to hold him,” he admits. “I haven’t held a baby since Yelena was born. She was so tiny. I was so afraid I was going to hurt her.” Matvey never talks about his sister because it hurts him too much, but now when he mentions her name, there’s sadness in his eyes, but there’s also a soft smile playing at his lips. “She was such a sweet baby, always smiling.”

I rest my cheek against his and run my fingers through the back of his hair. “She never grew out of that,” I tell him, remembering the dark-eyed girl who was several years older than me. I didn’t know her well, and Matvey didn’t live in our building, so I only saw her every once in a while, but she’d always smile and say hi and ask how I was. I think she knew I was in love with her brother and thought it was cute. She never teased me about it, though, and I was always so grateful for that. I was only eight when she died, but I still think of her often, wondering what she’d be like, who she would’ve grown up to become.

“I’m so sorry, Matvey,” I whisper, wishing I could take all his pain from him.

“I have you, Alina. I can handle anything as long as I have you in my arms.”

“You’re going to make me cry again.”

“You might as well let it out.” He gives a soft laugh. “We both know you’re going to lose it as soon as you see your nephew.”

“True. I’m going to be a mess as soon as I see the cutie.”

“You’re going to be a great aunt.”

I kiss his cheek. “You’re going to be a great uncle.”

“I’m going to propose properly, just so you know. I already think of you as mine in every way possible, but I want to do it right. You deserve everything, and I want to make sure you get it.”

“I already have everything.”

He pulls back so he can see me, running his eyes over my face and smiling at the lovestruck look that I have no doubt I’m giving him. I can’t help it. For years I never thought I’d ever have him, and then I did, only to have it ripped from me in the worst way possible. I promised myself when I was trapped with Konstantin that if I ever found my way to Matvey again, I’d never take a moment of our time together for granted. I know firsthand how quickly things can change, how quickly they can be taken from you, and I won’t ever waste any precious seconds that I have with him. Sometimes memories threaten to take over and pull me someplace dark,

sometimes it's out of my control when I'm asleep and I have no choice but to succumb to them, but I never give into them willingly, and I never will. It's a choice to embrace the good, and I'll never stop fighting for that. I'll never stop fighting for *us*.

Matvey runs a finger down my face, hooking it under my chin and tilting me up to him. The kiss he gives me is slow and deep and when he pulls back, I'm more than a little dazed. His lips brush against mine when he whispers, "I'm really glad you didn't have time to shower this morning. I love that you're covered in me."

I'm still smiling when we hear the others start laughing. We both turn to see everyone staring at us. Lev raises a pierced brow at us while Vitaly nudges his shoulder. They're enjoying this too damn much and making no attempt to hide it.

"Leave them alone," Simona says, giving me a smile. "They can smooch all they want."

Danil laughs and kisses her. "But if they start smooching, then we're gonna start, and then the others will too, and before you know it, Christine will be back up here tossing all our asses out for indecent exposure."

Simona laughs. "I said smooching. I didn't say anything about getting naked in the waiting room."

Danil winks at her. "A guy can dream."

Smiling, I lay my head against Matvey's shoulder, watching my family while we wait for the newest member to join us. Matvey runs his hand along my back, and when I rest my hand on his chest, my shirt falls down my wrist, revealing the black stitches that still mar my skin.

"These need to come out." He gently runs a finger underneath the black thread. "I'm sorry, *malishka*. These should've been taken out a couple of days ago."

"It's okay. I'm sure Dr. Bianchi can take them out soon."

Soon isn't good enough for Matvey, though. He lets out a hum of disapproval at the idea of me waiting a few days and then shakes his head, making it clear he's made up his mind.

"No, these need to come out now."

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 16

Matvey

I'm pissed at myself for letting her stitches stay in so long. I don't want the scarring to be worse or for it to hurt when they're removed, and I should've made damn sure it was taken care of. She sees something on my face that has her leaning in to kiss my cheek.

"I'm fine, Matvey," she says, giving me a smile to let me know she really is okay. "It's only been a few days past the two weeks Dr. Bianchi recommended.

I kiss her wrist, feeling the thick thread of the stitches against my lips. Pulling her up, I keep her pressed against me. "They're coming out now, baby." Looking at my brothers, I say, "I'm taking her to get these removed. Text me if you hear anything while we're gone."

Lev nods at me. "Will do."

Vitaly laughs. "Is this an excuse to find an empty storage closet? Be subtle, you two." He points a finger at us. "If you get caught, you're on your own. We're not all getting kicked out because you can't control yourselves."

"Jesus Christ," I groan, leading Alina out of the waiting room and away from their laughter. "He's never going to stop."

Alina laughs and looks up at me. "No, he won't, but I still love him."

"Yeah, me too," I mutter, making her give a soft laugh as I lead her down the hall. Finn follows at Alina's heels, head up and alert.

The maternity ward is busy, so we make our way down a few halls while I try to find us a quieter place. I ignore the no-nonsense nurses who speed walk past us. No way in hell will they take a bribe to do an off-the-

record procedure. I'm not worried, though. I've stitched my brothers up enough to know how this works.

When I find an empty exam room, I wait for the hall to empty before winking at Alina and pulling her in, shutting the door behind us when Finn's bushy tail is clear of the doorway.

"Matvey, what are you doing?"

I lift her up onto the exam table and kiss the tip of her nose. "I'm removing your stitches."

"I'm pretty sure you're not allowed to do that." She darts a nervous look at the door, and I laugh. After everything we've been through and everything we've done, she's still afraid we're going to get caught for sneaking into an exam room.

"My cute little rule follower." I run my thumb over the scowl she gives me before turning to look through the drawers behind me. Finding what I need, I grab a pair of latex gloves from the box hanging on the wall and pull them on because I'm not taking any chances with germs.

She eyes the sterile package I open. "Do you know what you're doing?"

I laugh and pour disinfectant all over her wrist. "Lev's been doing a lot of underground fighting over the last two years, and he's been kind enough to come home with split skin so I can practice. I've actually gotten pretty good with a needle."

"Maybe you can cross-stitch us a pillow."

I laugh and shake my head, happy to see glimpses of her old smartass self. Grabbing the tweezers and scissors from the sterile pack, I carefully get started on the first stitch.

"Let me know if this hurts."

"Okay," she whispers, holding her breath and watching as I snip the first black thread and pull it free. Dr. Bianchi did a good job, and the wound is healing nicely, but it's still going to leave one hell of a scar. My girl did not go easy on herself that night. Memories of seeing her sliced-up wrist run through my mind, and before I pull out the next stitch, I lean down and kiss the palm of her hand. Her fingers run through my hair before I lift back up and keep working, neither one of us saying anything as I make my way around her wrist until all the stitches are out. Her skin is pink and not even close to being fully healed, but it looks better than it did a few minutes ago.

Before I toss everything in the garbage, I spread antibiotic cream over her wrist and bandage it up. I don't want to risk leaving it open while we're

at the hospital. There's a lot of germs floating around in here.

"Thanks, Matvey."

I step between her thighs, cupping her face as I smile down at her. "I'd say anytime, but I really don't want to ever see you covered in stitches again."

"Such a big softie," she teases, grabbing my shirt and pulling me closer.

I run my hands down her back and cup her ass, scooting her closer so our bodies are pressed together and she can feel the hard length of my cock against her stomach. Her soft moan has me tightening my grip on her perfect ass.

"Still think I'm a big softie, *malishka*?"

I rock my hips and ghost my lips over hers.

"No," she whispers. "Definitely not soft."

Bringing one hand up, I fist her hair, gently tilting her head back, nipping at her full, bottom lip. Her eyes are more green today than blue, vivid and beautiful and filled with so much love and lust.

"I love that I can kiss you anytime I want." I flick my tongue against her top lip, smiling when she lets out a whimper. "I love that I can taste you and touch you whenever I need to." My hand moves from her ass. I drag my fingers slowly up her body, feeling the curve of her hip, the swell of her breast, the dip of her clavicle, before finally cupping her face. I meet her heavy-lidded eyes and caress her skin with my thumb. "I love that you're mine, *malishka*."

"Always," she whispers, her breath feather-soft against my lips. "I'll always be yours, Matvey."

With a groan, I close the small distance, pressing my lips to hers in a hungry kiss that quickly consumes me. She opens for me, running her tongue along mine before sucking me in deep. God, this woman drives me crazy. Her greedy fingers fist my hair as she wraps her legs around me, trying like hell to rock her hips, desperate for some friction on her aching pussy, and all I can think about is how badly I want to take the ache from her and replace it with the kind of pleasure that will make her scream my name and soak her panties. I'm just about to slip a hand in her pants when my phone dings from my back packet.

She gives a soft whimper while I let out a frustrated groan. Excitement quickly replaces it when I realize what the text means right as Alina whispers an excited, "Oh shit."

I grab my phone and hold it so we can both read Vitaly's text.

Better finish your quickie. The nurse just said Emily's about to start pushing, and they don't think it's going to be long at all before he's born.

Before I can even respond, he texts again.

On second thought, maybe take your time. It'll make for one hell of a birthing story when he's older. I'll make sure and document every spicy detail in his baby book so he knows exactly what his Uncle Matvey and Aunt Alina were up to the moment of his birth.

"Fucker," I say with a laugh, shooting a quick text to let him know we're on our way. When I look back at Alina, her face is lit up. "Ready, baby?"

"Yeah, I can't wait to meet him."

I cup her face and kiss her once more before helping her down. "Me either."

She surprises me by reaching out and palming my now semi-hard cock. "We'll finish this later."

Laughing, I readjust myself so it's not so obvious what we've been doing. "Fuck yes we will."

She smiles and grabs Finn's leash, petting him on the head and praising him for being a good boy while we made out on the exam table. I crack the door open, making sure the hallway is clear before we slip out and head back. The others are still waiting when we walk in.

Ignoring Vitaly's huge grin, Alina looks at his wife instead. "I can't believe she's already pushing."

"I know," Katya says. "I couldn't believe it either."

Simona rubs her round stomach. "I really hope I get that lucky."

Danil places his hand over hers. "I hope so too, *sladkaya*. You'll do great, though, no matter how long the labor lasts. We'll get you an epidural, and I'll bring you ice chips and rub your back and feet."

Simona looks at all of us. "You heard him. I better get unlimited massage time and ice chips while in labor."

"You could always just deliver the baby in your kinky, soundproofed room," Vitaly says. "Then you can scream as loud as you want."

Alina looks over at me, brow raised in confusion. I lean down and whisper, "I'll explain later, baby," and give a soft laugh.

Simona blushes and points a finger at Vitaly. "You know I have a piano in there. I don't want to disturb everyone while I practice."

This time Vitaly isn't the only one who laughs.

"What?" Simona looks at all of us, cheeks turning pinker with each passing second. She looks to her husband for help, but he's too busy laughing. "I have stage fright," she insists. "You all know that."

"Uh-huh," Vitaly says. "That's absolutely the only reason Danil soundproofed the room, so you could practice on the piano."

"I bet they've done a lot of things on that piano," Lev mutters, making everyone start laughing again.

"You guys are terrible." Simona's trying to look irritated, but she's not fooling anyone. It's obvious she's trying not to laugh, and when she meets Danil's eyes, she loses the battle, joining in with the rest of us.

Alina and I sit back down, her in my lap and Finn at her feet, while we wait for our nephew to be born. It seems to take forever while still managing to feel like it's only been a few minutes when a nurse walks in with a big smile on her face.

"Everything went great. He's healthy and perfect."

We're all so excited that it's a few seconds before she can continue because we're laughing and talking too loudly for her to speak. When it's quieter, she laughs and says, "He's getting cleaned up and weighed, but you can come and see him through the window if you want."

She doesn't have to ask us twice. We're all already standing to follow her out of the room before she can even turn around. Finn gives an excited tail wag, picking up on the mood around him, and I wrap an arm around Alina's waist, pulling her closer with a big smile on my face.

"This is it, baby," I whisper, kissing her temple, just as excited as she is.

I look around at the men I've grown up with, the men I've chosen as brothers and laugh. I've seen each of these guys do unspeakable violence, and yet here they are, laughing and smiling and so damn eager to meet the newest member of our family.

A big bunch of softies is what we are.

We follow the nurse down the hall, and when she turns a corner and we see a room up ahead with a large viewing window, Alina squeezes my hand and gives me a big, excited smile. I return it right before she turns her head to look back at the window and gives an awe-filled sigh when we step closer and get our first glimpse of Roman's son.

Tears immediately fill her eyes, and I'm torn between wanting to keep staring at her beautiful face and wanting to see the cause of her reaction. I

run my eyes over her once more, memorizing every detail of this moment before turning to see the little guy. In less than a second, my face is mirroring hers, because the tiny little life in front of me takes the breath right out of my lungs.

"Wow," I whisper, holding Alina tighter against me as we watch the nurse swaddle him in a blue blanket. His tiny fists are bunched up when she gently presses them down so she can wrap the blanket more snugly around his small body. His head is a mass of dark, silky hair, and his mouth is open and rooting around. The nurse immediately gives him a pacifier, and his eyes drift closed as soon as she does.

"He's so beautiful," Alina whispers.

I kiss her temple and keep my face close to hers. "He's perfect."

"There's the proud daddy."

We all look up at the sound of Lev's voice and watch Roman walk into the room. He smiles over at us, and I'm guessing he'll be wearing that huge grin for several days. Hell, it may never come off. He says something to the nurse and motions at the wall of family gawking at the window. The nurse laughs and nods her head before picking up Roman's son and putting him in his arms. Roman smiles down at his son before kissing his head and walking closer to us so we can all see him better.

Tears are already streaming down Alina's face when Roman stands near the window and angles his arms so his sister can see her nephew.

"He's so beautiful," she whispers again, pressing her hand to the glass, and letting out a soft gasp when he opens his eyes, the same vivid green as his dad's.

Wrapping my arms around Alina's upper chest, I pull her back against me, hugging her from behind while pressing my cheek to hers. We watch as Roman carries him down the line, letting everyone get a good look at him before coming to stand in front of us again. Alina's hand presses against the window, desperately wanting to hold him.

When I look up and meet Roman's eyes, I'm not at all surprised to find them glassy. He's trying like hell to keep it together, but I've never seen the man so happy. It's impossible for me to not imagine myself in his shoes right now, proudly holding a beautiful baby that Alina and I created together. The very idea of it pulls a longing from me that's all-consuming, and it shocks the hell out of me.

“I changed my mind,” Alina whispers when Roman gives us one last look before walking back over to the nurse so she can finish.

“What?”

She turns her head so we’re facing one another, so close our noses are almost touching. “I want this. I was afraid that maybe it would be too much or that I’d be too scared to go for it, but I was wrong.”

I don’t say anything for a second, refusing to make her feel pressured in any way. “What exactly do you want, *malishka*?”

“Everything,” she says on a soft sigh. “I want everything with you. I want a family, and I want to see you holding our baby. I want to raise a family with you, Matvey. I want it all. I don’t care how long it takes, or how many visits with Dr. Taylor or whatever else I need to do to get myself mentally where I need to be, but I’m going to do it. I *want* to do it.”

I cup her face and give her a big smile. “You’re the strongest person I’ve ever known, Alina, and whenever you’re ready, I would love to start a family with you.”

She gives me the sweetest smile and kisses me, making me feel like the luckiest man alive. I know the birth control shot is still in her system, and I read that it can take a while to get pregnant after getting off of it, but I’m not worried. The fact that she’s even excited and talking about our future children means everything to me. When it happens, it happens. I’m more than happy to sit back and enjoy the process.

“Come on. He’s waving us back.” Lev lightly smacks my shoulder on his way past. I look over and see everyone heading back down the hall we came from. Katya, Simona, and Jolene are still wiping away tears, and I have no doubt Alina is going to start crying again as soon as she holds her nephew.

“Ready to hold him?”

She smiles and kisses me again. “Yes, more than ready.”

Keeping her close, I thread my fingers through hers while we follow the others. Finn walks at her side, looking around and giving the occasional sniff but otherwise not phased in the slightest by what’s going on around him. His focus continues to be on Alina, exactly where it should be.

A nurse is waiting for us around the corner, ready to lead us to the room they’ve moved Emily to. At the last door on the right, she gives a soft knock.

“Come in,” Emily calls out, and even though I can hear the exhaustion in her voice, she sounds so fucking happy.

We all walk in, filling the room even though it’s a decent-sized one with a reclining chair and an extra bed so Roman can stay here, too. Instead of loud congratulations, we keep our voices low, not wanting to disturb the small bundle in Emily’s arms.

“Oh my god, he’s precious,” Simona whispers, running a finger over his chubby cheek.

“We’re dying here,” Jolene says, scooting closer so she can see better. “What’s his name? You can’t keep it secret any longer.”

Roman and Emily have been tight-lipped about baby names, and we’ve all been making guesses on what it’s going to be.

“You named him Vitaly, didn’t you, after his favorite uncle?” Vitaly laughs and strokes the baby’s head.

Emily laughs. “No.” She looks over at Roman and gives him a big smile before saying, “We’d like you all to meet Luka Melnikov.”

Hearing his mom’s voice, he opens his eyes, and, I swear, gives her a big, gummy smile, and just like that, we all fall in love with Luka. While everyone takes turns holding him, Alina squeezes my hand and leads me over to her brother. As soon as she’s close enough, she pulls him in for a big hug. He wraps his arms around her, and I know he’s thinking the same thing I am, the same thing all of us are, this could’ve so easily gone the other way. One slight change of anything these past two years, and we could’ve missed our chance at finding Alina, and this room would feel so much emptier without her.

Roman kisses her cheek and whispers something in her ear before pulling back and blinking away the tears. He turns his attention to me next, and I know what’s coming right before he pulls me in for a hug. My brothers rarely touch me because they know I hate it, but today is a special day and none of us have ever been good at following rules.

With his arms wrapped around me, he lowers his voice so only I can hear. “There’s no one else I would ever trust with my sister, Matvey. I know you’re a stubborn ass, and you’d never ask me for permission, but I’m giving it to you anyway. You have my blessing, and I can’t tell you how happy it makes me to finally see you two together. Take care of her, brother.”

“I will. I promise I will. Always,” I tell him, returning his hug and refusing to cry like a goddamn baby. “I’ll kick your ass if you ever step in front of a gun again, but thanks for doing it. I’m pretty sure that bullet wouldn’t have hit me in the same spot.” I’d seen the man aiming at me, and I know for a fact that gun was pointed right at my heart. I have no doubt I’d be dead if it wasn’t for Roman.

“You would’ve done the same for me,” is all he says because he knows it’s the truth.

Giving my shoulder a squeeze, he releases me and goes back to stand near his wife’s bed. Lev’s currently holding Luka, who’s staring up at the piercings and probably wishing he could get his little hands on them.

“What was that about?” Alina whispers, wrapping her arms around me again so she’s hugging my side with her head resting on my chest. I kiss the top of her head and circle my arms around her.

“Your brother just gave me his blessing to marry you.”

She lets out a soft laugh. “Better ask me soon, Matvey, before he changes his mind.”

I smile and give her another kiss while watching Lev pass Luka to Vitaly, who immediately starts baby talking to him in Russian.

I laugh and say, “You can tell him you’re his favorite uncle all you want, but that doesn’t make it true. You can’t brainwash the poor kid.”

Vitaly keeps smiling at Luka and baby talking to him. “Just ignore your mean Uncle Matvey and keep listening to your favorite Uncle Vitaly.”

“You’re terrible,” I say, laughing at his attempts to condition a newborn.

“Ooh, my turn,” Alina quickly says when Vitaly looks around for whoever wants him next.

I’d be lying if I said a massive lump doesn’t immediately form in my throat when I see Alina with a baby in her arms. She smiles down at him, looking every bit the natural as she gently sways from side to side and leans down to kiss his soft forehead.

The room grows silent as we all watch the moment we’ve worked so damn hard for. As soon as Emily found out she was pregnant, it’s been our mission to get Alina back before she gave birth, and we did it. She’s here, safe and sound and holding her nephew, and it makes my heart fucking break in the best possible way to see it.

Right as I’m thinking it, Alina lifts her eyes to mine, giving me the sweetest smile while Luka clutches at her finger, making her laugh. I can’t

take my eyes off her. My whole world is standing in front of me, and all I can do is stare, completely in awe of her.

She steps closer to me and cups the back of Luka's small head, holding him out to me. "Your turn, Matvey."

"I don't know." I'm suddenly nervous about holding something so damn small and breakable. I'm worried I'll do something wrong and hurt him, but a part of me is also terrified that I'll have the same reaction when he touches me, the *bugs crawling over my skin* feeling that I get with everyone who isn't Alina.

Alina just smiles and then looks down at Luka's cute face. "This is your Uncle Matvey," she coos at him before kissing his cheek and putting him in my arms.

My body instantly freezes, too afraid to move, but then Alina adjusts him a little bit and the little guy looks up at me and smiles and all my worries fade away. Roman's green eyes look up at me, so similar to his aunt's, and knowing that a part of her also runs through him makes me instantly feel close to him. He snuggles up against my chest, and I'm surprised by how easily I could sit here holding him for hours, not the slightest bit uncomfortable about the close contact.

I can't resist shooting Vitaly a smug grin. "I think he's chosen his favorite."

"Wait until he's old enough to be bribed with candy and toys," he says, laughing.

I look back at Luka, smiling down at him and then look up to see Alina snapping photos of us. I give her a wink, realizing that I've started doing the same gentle swaying motion that she'd been doing. Instinct just takes over, and I rock him gently while his eyes drift shut. Yelena used to love being held like this. I wasn't too much older than her, but our dad was a piece of shit, and our mom was often exhausted from trying to keep it all together, so I'd step in and try to help keep Yelena happy so she could rest or get supper made. It's been a long time since I've been able to remember anything about my sister except for the way she'd screamed when the flames hit her skin.

Pushing the thought aside, I look over at Roman and Emily. "He's beautiful," I tell them before turning my head to Danil. "You're next, brother. You ready for this?"

The huge smile on his face says it all. “Absolutely.” He kisses Simona’s head and pulls her closer. “We both are.”

“Well, I’m ready for the cute baby in my arms,” she says, “not so much the whole labor and delivery thing.”

“The epidural helps,” Emily says, leaning back against her pillows. She smiles when Roman puts another blanket on her and then tries to hide her yawn from him.

He instantly looks worried as he takes her hand and kisses it. Knowing she needs to rest and that Luka will probably want to eat again soon, we start to say our goodbyes. I keep holding him while everyone hugs and the women hand over the bags from home. Roman had already brought the bag she’d packed weeks ago, but they wanted her to have a few extra things to make her and Luka as comfortable as possible. Plus, there’s a bag filled with the customary *It’s a boy! g*oodies.

When it’s time, I walk over and hand Luka back over to his dad. Luka wakes up enough to start rooting around, and that’s when we really know it’s time to go. Emily laughs as all the uncles make a quick retreat when she takes him from Roman so he can nurse. Alina gives her a quick hug before kissing her nephew’s head and then hugging Roman one last time while Vitaly slips the keys to the minivan on the stand by the bed, sneaking out the door before Roman can notice and give him hell for it.

Alina waves at them both and squeezes Roman’s hand. “Call us if you need anything at all.”

“We will. Love you, sis.” He smiles and sits down on the edge of the bed so he can be near his family.

“Love you, too,” she tells him, while I give them a wave before closing the door behind us.

It isn’t until we’re pulling into the parking garage that I get a text from Timofey.

Not sure these two can hang on much longer like this. Pyotr says they’re getting an infection.

Alina looks over at me, noticing my change in mood as I read what Timofey’s written. I always thought I’d be the one to end Konstantin’s life. Knowing I was going to get my revenge on the man who took Alina was the only thing that kept me going at times, but now I can’t bring myself to do it. At first I told myself it was because I wanted him to suffer, and then it was because I didn’t want to leave Alina’s side, but now I know why I waited,

why some part of me was so hesitant to sink the blade in deep enough to end all this.

It’s because he’s not mine to kill.

He’s hers.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 17

Alina

I watch Matvey send off a text, knowing something is off, and when he puts his phone away and lifts his dark eyes to mine, I wait for him to tell me what it is.

"Do you trust me, *malishka*?"

"Always," I say without hesitation.

He smiles at my quick response and then hollers at the others while they start walking to the elevator. "We'll be back in a bit."

Lev raises a pierced brow at him. "You doing what I think you're doing?"

"Yeah." Matvey pulls the keys to his Camaro out of his pocket. "It's time to finish this."

"Send pics!" Vitaly hollers while Matvey grabs my hand and leads me to his car. Finn perks up and stays close to my side, jumping in the backseat when Matvey opens the door for him.

"You're going to kill him?"

He smiles, waiting for me to get in the passenger seat. As soon as I'm sitting, he leans down and winks. "No, baby, you are."

And with that, he shuts the door. I watch him walk around the hood before cutting my eyes to Finn's alert ones. His ears are perked up, his tongue hanging out, and when he makes a low, grumbling noise like he's trying to tell me something, I laugh while he licks my face.

"Yeah, yeah, don't worry. You're coming along for the ride, no matter what that ride might be."

Matvey gets in and starts the car, letting it warm so we can get the heater on.

“Why are you changing your plans?”

He looks over at me and shrugs his broad shoulders. “I think deep down I knew all along that this was your kill to make. I fought it because I didn’t want you involved in violence. You’ve already seen too much of it, but when I saw you the night of the auction, I realized how badly you need this. He’s your monster to kill, baby. I’m not about to take that from you.” He gives a soft laugh and adds, “I’m not going to lie, though, he’s in rough shape because I did have a bit of fun with him.”

“What did the text say that you just got?”

“That was Timofey letting me know that they’re going to die soon if we don’t get them some serious help. We can do that, if you want, or you can end it today.”

“I want it over,” I tell him. “I want that fucker dead and gone.”

“Fuckers,” Matvey corrects. “Osip’s still alive, too.”

“I might let you have him. I’m not sure yet. The last time I saw Osip, he forced his fingers inside me and made it very clear that he’d be raping me behind Konstantin’s back very soon.”

Matvey’s hands tighten on the steering wheel as he pulls out into traffic, growling out something that’s too low for me to hear before he says, “He no longer has any fingers to assault you with.”

“You cut off all his fingers?”

“I did, the same way Danil and I cut off Stefan’s fingers. Danil took a hand because he violated Simona, and I took a hand because he recognized your photo and I knew he’d done the same to you. Roman took his toes, and then the fun really began.”

“Stefan?” I ask, trying to process everything he’s telling me. The only other man to touch me besides Konstantin and Osip had been the old, pervy doctor who first examined me to see if I was a virgin. A much younger man had held me down while the doctor had fingered me and then jerked off against my leg. I can still remember how the bile had come up my throat at the feel of him. I shake my head to clear it. “The doctor? You killed him?”

“Fuck yes we did, and Emil, the little fuck who held you all down while he did it. The night you killed those men at the auction, I told you the women had been rescued and the men onboard killed. Well, he was one of them. Stefan we killed a few months ago. Simona recognized the doctor at an after-auction party they went to. That was a good night.” He looks over and gives me a quick smile. “It’s the first time I felt like we were getting

close to finding you. Shortly after that Simona was able to identify Konstantin as the man she'd seen before she was sold. From then on, we put all our focus on the Lebedev Bratva. Then Vitaly married Katya to unite the families, and you know the rest."

"I still can't believe he did that."

Matvey grabs my hand and kisses the back of it. "We would've done anything to find you, Alina, and it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to him."

"He does seem really happy with her."

"He is." He gives a soft laugh. "It shocked the hell out of all of us, but I think it shocked him most of all."

I laugh and rest my hand on his thigh. "I bet it did."

I watch the city pass us by, remembering the last time I made this drive and how different it had been. I remember the fear and the pain and the ache in my heart that never went away.

When we're close enough for me to see the security gate to the mansion, Matvey rests his hand on top of mine, giving it a soft squeeze. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." I stare out the window, watching the front gate get closer and closer. Armed men are waiting, but as soon as they see Matvey, they give him a wave and open the iron gate for us to drive through. When the mansion comes into view, my breath catches in my throat. My heart starts racing when I think about the bedroom I was held in, the thin, bare mattress I wasn't allowed to sleep on, my forced nakedness, no matter how cold I was, and all the times my body was used without my permission.

Finn gives a soft whimper, nudging his furry face close to mine so he can rest his head on my shoulder, nose nuzzling in against my cheek. He continues to amaze me with how damn perceptive he is. I reach up and scratch behind his ears.

"It's okay, Finn."

Matvey parks in front of the garage and angles his body towards me. Reaching up, he pets Finn's fur and then cups my face to kiss me.

"We will leave the second you tell me you want to go, *malishka*." He glances over at the closed garage door. "If you want to turn around right now and go home, we will."

"No," I quickly say, reaching up to grab his wrist. "I need to do this. I need to face him and prove that I'm no longer scared of him, to prove that

he’s no longer in control of me.”

“Whatever you need me to do, I’ll do it.” He drags his thumb over my cheek while keeping his dark eyes on mine. “No matter what.”

I squeeze his wrist tighter, knowing he means every word of what he’s saying. If I want to kill Konstantin, he’ll stand back and watch me do it. If I want him to do it, he’ll step forward and happily take the burden from me, and if I decide it’s too much and I don’t want to be here or see any of it, he’ll get me the hell out of here without a second thought. Knowing all this is what gives me the courage to smile and say, “I want to see him.”

“Okay, *malishka*.” He kisses me gently before getting out of the car. I open the door and step out with Finn before he’s even had time to walk around the hood of the car. Taking my hand in his, he leads me to the side of the four-car garage where a side door is already open for us. I’m surprised to see it unguarded, but when I look in, I see how wrong I am. Several armed men are in the garage, and as soon as we step in, two men step out, presumably to go back to standing guard right outside the door we just walked through. They’d evidently just stepped inside to open the door and clear a path for us.

The smell hits me first, and Finn gives a soft whine at the scent. Unwashed bodies, filth and blood, and the unmistakeable smell of burnt flesh wafts over me before the men in front of us step aside, revealing Konstantin and Osip.

“Everyone leave,” Matvey orders, and the men clear out, leaving us alone with the Lebedev brothers. “You’re safe, baby,” Matvey whispers near my ear, reminding me that these men will never hurt me again.

They’re in no position to hurt anyone. They look more dead than alive at this point, and when I step closer, Matvey and Finn follow at my side. Both men are hanging from bound wrists, the chains digging into their skin, the limbs pale from lack of blood circulation. They’re naked and filthy and covered in dried blood and some vicious looking cuts and stitches.

Osip is the closest to me, but I ignore him and stop in front of Konstantin. One of his eyes is swollen shut, and the other only has a small slit he can see through, and I know the second he sees me because he sucks in a quick breath. The air rattles in his lungs, and if all the bruising along his chest means anything, then I’m guessing he might have a collapsed lung. When I see how prominent his rib bones are, I can’t help but smile. He used to be so scary to me, so big and powerful, and now he’s nothing.

I run a finger up his ribs, making sure to press hard enough to make him wince. “This is how you always liked me. Do you remember?” He doesn’t answer so I press harder and don’t stop until I hear his pained groan. “You wanted to be able to feel every single rib and see them through my skin.”

I can feel the rage coming off Matvey’s body, but he doesn’t jump in and take over. He stays by my side, hands curled into fists, wanting to hit Konstantin but resisting for my benefit. I give him a quick smile to let him know how much I appreciate it before turning my focus back to the defeated monster hanging in front of me.

“I thought I’d spend the rest of my life being afraid of you,” I admit, running my eyes over the broken man before me, giving a soft laugh when I see the flaccid cock between his legs, “but you’re not near as scary as I remember you being.”

Turning to Matvey, I hold out my hand to him. The corner of his mouth lifts in a grin when he hands me a knife, making sure to put the handle in my palm so there’s no way the razor-sharp blade can cut me.

“Sorry.” The word comes out soft and scratchy from Konstantin’s parched throat. “I’m sorry.”

I raise a brow at him and give a harsh laugh. “You’re sorry? Oh, well I guess everything’s okay then. You had me kidnapped and then kept me prisoner and brutally raped me for two goddamn years, but you’re sorry now, so I guess I’m supposed to forgive you and let you go?”

“Just kill us,” Osip begs from where he’s hanging a few feet away.

I point the knife at him. “Patience, Osip. It’ll be your turn soon enough. You always were bad at waiting, weren’t you?” I turn back to Konstantin. “Did you know he was planning on raping me?” His one good eye widens the tiniest bit in surprise, proving that this is the first time he’s hearing any of this.

“The night you took me to the Red Viper, you asked Osip to walk me out to the car. He fingered me, promising that soon he’d be having his way with me and that I wasn’t allowed to say a goddamn word about it.”

If Konstantin still had the strength, he’d be in a rage. I can see it written all over his body and in the expression on his face. He’s pissed. Even now, he’s pissed at the idea of anyone else touching his pet.

“I’m not yours.” I barely recognize the rage-filled sound of my voice. “I was *never* yours. You took me and forced my submission, but I never willingly gave a single part of myself to you, and I never would have.”

I look over at Matvey and smile. “Every part of me already belonged to Matvey, except he didn’t take anything from me. I willingly gave him everything.”

“Not everything.”

Matvey’s eyes fill with a mix of rage and pain at Konstantin’s words and the reminder of what he did to me. I turn my eyes back to the half-dead man hanging before me and the smug smirk that he’s trying to give me. Even now, he’s trying to scare me, trying to get under my skin and exert control over me, but I see him for what he is now. He’s not the big bad scary rapist. He’s just a pathetic fuck who can’t get hard unless he’s overpowering someone smaller.

“I was your first,” he reminds me. He gives a soft laugh, but it quickly turns into a wheezing cough.

“Shut the fuck up,” Osip murmurs, lacking the strength to yell the words. “Just shut the fuck up.”

I grip the handle of the knife tighter while Finn gives a low growl. Stepping even closer, I press the tip of the blade against his chest, just deep enough to break skin. Blood beads around the knife, but he doesn’t make a sound, not even when I drag the blade down his chest, pressing a little harder the further I go. He’s quiet until I reach the dark line of hair below his belly button. That’s when he lets out a groan, and I see a flicker of fear in his eye.

“It’s not near as much fun when you’re on the receiving end, is it?” I taunt, pressing the blade in harder before I get to his limp dick.

“Don’t.” He swallows and tries his best to use his one good eye to look down and see what I’m about to do. “Please, don’t.”

“You beg so sweetly,” I purr at him. “Remember how you used to say that to me?” Dragging the blade along his dick, I watch the line of crimson form, spilling down his shaft before the droplets hit the cement floor.

“Do you remember what else you used to tell me?” I lift a brow at him and wait. “No? Well, let me refresh your memory, *sir*.” I spit the word out, feeling the bile threaten to rise at all the times he made me call him that, made me beg for the simplest of things and then made me thank him when he allowed me a drink of water or a chance to go to the bathroom or eat a few bites of food.

The more I remember, the angrier I get, and when I stab the knife into his genitals, he screams while I yell, “Oh, you’re taking it so goddamn

good, pet.”

The pain and shock widen his eye, letting me see the full force of what I’m doing to him. I don’t shy away from the pain I’m giving him. Instead, I stab him again and again and again.

“Such sweet fucking tears,” I growl. “You look so beautiful when you cry for me.”

“Jesus fuck!” Osip cries from beside us, but I barely hear him. All I can hear are the words Konstantin used to taunt me with, and I give them all back to him until I see his eye lose focus and the last wheezy breath leave his lungs. His head slumps over, and everything inside me grows cold when I look at what I’ve done.

I didn’t just stab Konstantin’s dick. I fucking obliterated it. There’s nothing but a bloody, gaping wound where his genitals used to be, and when my body starts shaking, Matvey’s arms quickly wrap around me, holding me against his strong chest as the knife drops from my hand, clattering on the hard floor.

“Just breathe, *malishka*. It’s okay. I’ve got you now.” He cups the back of my head and presses his lips to my temple, leaving a trail of kisses down my cheek while he whispers, “It’s okay, baby. I’m so fucking proud of you. You won’t ever have to see him again. It’s over now.”

I nod and cry against his chest. Relieved and horrified and more than ready to be done with this place. Finn nudges his head against my leg, leaning his weight against me to offer his comfort.

“I can’t do any more,” I whisper.

“You don’t have to. I’ll take care of Osip.”

He holds me while I cry, both of us ignoring Osip’s sniffling sobs, and when I feel well enough, I give him one more hug and then take a step back.

“Please hurry,” I tell him.

Matvey waits just long enough to make sure I’m okay, and when he’s satisfied that I am, he picks the bloody knife up and goes to Osip. Wanting to get me out of here but also wanting to give Osip a painful death, he compromises and grabs the man’s dick, cutting it off in one quick motion that pulls a guttural scream from Osip’s lungs before slamming the knife into his chest. He hits him just perfectly so the death will last a few minutes. Before he steps back, he shoves the cut-off dick in Osip’s mouth, letting the man choke while he bleeds out.

Stepping back, Matvey wraps an arm around me while we watch the last Lebedev brother slowly die. When it's finished, I let out the breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding. I take one last look at the two men who made my life a living hell, and then I turn away from my past and look instead to my future.

I meet Matvey's dark eyes while petting Finn's head. "Let's go home."

He smiles and leans down to kiss my forehead. Grabbing my hand, he threads his fingers through mine and leads me from the garage.

"Get rid of the bodies," he yells to the men who are waiting outside.

They rush inside, but I don't look back, not even when I hear one of them whisper, "Goddamn," when he sees the mess we've made. I'm ready to leave it all behind. Therapy with Dr. Taylor has been nice, but I'm not sure anything could've helped me as much as this. I wanted to see him pay, I wanted to see him feel a tiny bit of the pain that I'd felt, and I did.

Before Matvey leads me to the car, he takes me through another door that leads straight into a large kitchen. Turning on the faucet, he gently grabs my hands, pulling them under the water before lathering them with soap. He takes his time, making sure to get every drop of Konstantin's blood from my skin before he washes his own hands and then the knife we'd used. Closing it, he puts it back in his pocket and then cups my face with both his hands.

"Are you okay?" Dark eyes search mine, and when I nod, he lets out a relieved breath. "Let's go home, *malishka*. You've spent enough time around vile things. Our family's waiting for us, and Luka will get to come home soon."

At the mention of my nephew, I can't help but smile. I can still feel him in my arms, the slight weight of him and the sweet scent of his silky hair.

"If he wasn't a newborn baby, I'd be jealous of that look," Matvey teases, kissing my forehead and wrapping an arm around my waist, pulling me back out the door and to his waiting car. Finn runs off to use the bathroom before trotting back over to us. Matvey reaches into the pocket of his hoodie and pulls out a dog bone. Finn gobbles it up before jumping in the backseat, ready to go on another adventure.

"You carry around dog bones now?" I ask, raising a brow at him.

"I do. I like to be prepared for all sorts of things. I also have some fruit snacks in the glove box if you want some." When I laugh, he says, "I put them in there for Vitaly, but I'm sure he won't mind sharing."

I take him up on it and eat some on the drive back, sharing them when he holds his hand out to me.

“Should I feel guilty?” I ask when we’re only a few miles from the penthouse. “I’ve killed several men. Is it wrong that I don’t feel bad about it?”

“No, it’s not, and you shouldn’t feel guilty. You did the world a favor when you ended those men’s lives, *malishka*. They would’ve kept hurting women. Nothing was going to stop them or change them. We’ll never know how many women you just saved, but even if it was only one, even if you only spared one woman from having to go through what you went through, it was worth it. Don’t you think?”

“Yes.” I know he’s right, and I start to feel better about my lack of a conscience. They were bad men and now they can’t hurt anyone else. I’m more than ready to scrub it from my mind and move on. Stabbing that bastard had felt good, I’ll never deny that, but I don’t want it to taint my future. I don’t want to hold Luka’s small body and see blood on my hands. I want to protect him and love him, and one day I want to do the same for our own kids. My dick-stabbing days are over. I’m more than happy to hand the violence over to Matvey. I’m ready for some peace and quiet.

Suddenly the exhaustion hits me hard. My lack of sleep combined with all the excitement of Luka’s birth and then killing Konstantin, it’s starting to really take its toll. I’m covering a huge yawn when Matvey pulls into his parking spot.

“Just a little bit longer, *malishka*,” Matvey promises. He practically carries me to the elevator, and once we’re at the penthouse, he leads me back to our room and straight into the bathroom where he starts filling the large tub. Just the sight of all that hot water has my muscles starting to relax. He notices and smiles. “I’ll be right back, baby.”

He gives me a quick kiss and then pets Finn’s head on his way back out the door. Finn’s already sprawled on his bed, watching me through droopy eyes.

“It’s okay, boy. Take a nap.”

I swear he understands every word I say because he lets out a heavy sigh and closes his eyes. Turning back to the tub, I add in some bubbles and start to strip. I let out a sigh of my own as soon as I step into the hot water. Sinking beneath the surface, I lean my head back and close my eyes.

Pure heaven.

The sound of the water being cut off has me jerking my eyes open. Matvey's smiling face is the first thing I see.

"Decided to start without me?"

Turning to the side, I rest my arms along the rim and smile up at him. "Sorry. I couldn't resist." Noticing the plate he's brought, my smile grows. "You brought me food?"

The wink he gives me before he tugs off his hoodie makes my breath catch in my throat.

"I did, *malishka*. You need to eat. You burned way too many calories last night and haven't eaten anything today."

"Yeah, someone had me doing aerobics all night long."

He laughs and strips out of his jeans and boxers. When he's naked before me, all I can do is stare. I don't think there will ever be a time when he doesn't take my breath away or make my heart speed up with anticipation.

"Scoot up," he says, grabbing the plate and the large shake I hadn't noticed before stepping in when I give him the room.

He settles in behind me, setting the plate and drink on the ledge beside us so he can wrap his arms around me. "God, there's nothing better than you wet and naked," he murmurs against my skin.

I smile when he cups one of my breasts and I feel him grow hard against my back.

"So fucking perfect."

The gentle pinch he gives my nipple has me arching back and turning my face so I can kiss him. His stubble is thicker today since he hasn't had time to shave, and when I run my tongue along his jaw, he groans and pinches me harder.

"Fuck, you drive me crazy." With a sigh, he gives my breast one last squeeze before releasing me and reaching for the plate of food. "You need calories," he says again. "I can't have you passing out on me."

I smile as he grabs one of the cheeseburgers stacked on the plate and takes off the wrapper. "Did Vitaly stop at a drive-thru?"

Matvey grins and holds the cheeseburger to my lips so I can take a bite. "He did."

I take a big bite and then watch Matvey do the same, both of us chewing while we soak in the tub. Resting against his chest, I let him feed me, even though I'm at the point where I can feed myself. We share two

cheeseburgers and the fries he keeps offering me while taking turns with the shake until I'm too stuffed to eat another bite. Matvey finishes off the last cheeseburger and the rest of the fries while I watch him, studying his gorgeous profile until he finally laughs and hands me the last of the vanilla shake. I take a drink, savoring the sweetness on my tongue before handing back the last little bit of it. He finishes it and then pushes everything aside.

Resting my head against his wet chest, I feel completely at peace. I'm relaxed with my belly full and Matvey's strong arms wrapped around me, and there's nowhere else I'd rather be than right here with him. I run my finger along his chest, tracing the letters of my name while he grabs the handheld nozzle and starts to wet my hair.

"Don't fall asleep," he whispers, grabbing the shampoo and massaging it into my hair.

"No promises," I whisper back, my eyes already closing.

I hear his deep, soft laugh before he scoots me onto his lap so he can reach me better and ensure I don't fall asleep and slip under the water. His hands feel so damn good, massaging my scalp and body, and I fully relax into his touch, slipping in and out of consciousness until he scoops me into his arms and carries me out of the tub. The next thing I know, there's a warm towel patting me dry and then his naked body is pressed against mine and I'm surrounded in his warmth.

When I wake, it's to a dark room. I'm not sure how much time has passed, but Matvey's still wrapped around me, spooning me from behind, his heavy breaths hitting my neck.

"Shit," I mutter, thinking about how hungry Finn must be. I start to wriggle free, but Matvey just tightens his grip and groans his displeasure. "I need to feed Finn and let him out," I whisper, trying to loosen his firm hold on me.

"Already did it, baby," he murmurs against my neck. "I told you that you don't ever need to worry about anything ever again. I fed him and took him out after I was sure you were in a deep sleep. We even played tug of war."

I smile in the dark and kiss his forearm. "Who won?"

He gives a soft laugh. "He did. He's crazy strong."

I run my hand over the huge bicep that's currently squeezing me, knowing Finn isn't the only one who's crazy strong. Tilting my head, I kiss a line up his arm, nipping and sucking at his skin.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“You don’t need to thank me, *malishka*. He’s family now, and I take care of my family.”

When I run my tongue over his shoulder, he lets out a deep, masculine groan and grips my hip, holding me still while he rocks into me, letting me feel the hard length of him pressing against my ass.

“Does someone else need taken care of?” He cups one of my breasts, rolling my nipple between his fingers until it’s hard and achy and I’m whimpering for more. “Hmm?” he murmurs, rocking against me again while dragging the scarred pad of his thumb along my breast.

“Not fair,” I whisper, making him laugh.

“What’s not fair?” He keeps caressing my skin, teasing me with every touch, but when I try to rock against him, he tightens his grip on my hip, holding me in place. His touch is just hard enough to keep me still, and it feels more protective than punishing. When he loosens his grip and slides his hand down my thigh, lifting it so he can slide his cock between my legs, I moan his name and gently bite his shoulder.

He slides his thick length along my pussy. “What about this? Is this unfair?”

“Depends.” I reach up and cup the back of his head, fisting his hair and pulling him closer so I can run my tongue along the seam of his lips right as he drags the head of his cock along the seam of my pussy.

“On?” he growls.

“On whether or not you let me come.”

He lets out a soft laugh and presses harder against me, hard enough to part my pussy lips and slip inside. “Oh, you’re definitely going to come, *malishka*.”

His thick cock spreads me wide, and when I let out a soft gasp, he kisses me, delving deep inside, running his tongue along mine as he thrusts his hips and locks our bodies together. He feels impossibly deep, and yet my body opens up to him, welcoming him in even deeper until he bottoms out, and I’m completely trapped. Instead of feeling scared or helpless, though, I feel safe, and when I smile against his lips, he groans and cups my face.

“You are my life,” he whispers against my lips, holding me tightly while he gently starts working his hips, sliding in and out of me in a slow rhythm that ensures he’s hitting every damn nerve ending inside me. “You are everything to me.”

I moan his name, lifting my thigh even more to give him better access, but he doesn't speed up. He keeps fucking me in the same slow rhythm while he kisses me just as sweetly. It's intoxicating, and I feel drunk on him. Each thrust pulls a whimper from my body, pushing me closer and closer to the breaking point. He keeps me right on the edge, careful to not push me over, but when he gives my nipple another pinch while sliding his other hand lower, all I can do is beg.

"Please, Matvey." My words seem to ring through the room, but I know they were nothing but a ragged whisper. He hears it all the same and gives a soft laugh.

"Ready, *malishka*?" His words are soft against my lips as he drags a hand down my stomach, trailing his fingers along my skin. Every touch lights my body more on fire until I know I'm seconds away from going up in flames.

"Yes," I say in a breathy rush, gasping when he lightly brushes the pad of one finger over my clit.

"You look so beautiful when you're about to come," he whispers, nibbling on my bottom lip. "I still remember the first orgasm I ever gave you." He rubs my clit harder. "Do you remember, *malishka*?"

"Yes," I whimper when he slowly slides back into me. "I snuck into your room while you were sleeping and slipped into bed with you."

He gives a deep, masculine laugh while he rolls my clit between his fingers. "You did, but I think you're forgetting to mention that you were naked when you did it."

I laugh and then moan when his fingers work me harder.

"That was the first time you used my cock to get yourself off. Remember, *malishka*? Remember how you soaked me, grinding your sweet pussy up and down my length until I thought I was going to lose my goddamn mind?"

"I remember," I whisper, feeling the orgasm start to build between my legs as the memory plays in my mind and he thrusts into me a little harder.

"You were mine then, and you're mine now. There will never be a time when you aren't mine, Alina."

"Mm-hmm," I moan, nodding my head and rocking back against him. "Always, Matvey. I'll always be yours."

He kisses a line along my cheek until his lips are barely touching mine. "Give me what I want, *malishka*. Let me see you come undone."

I couldn’t stop the building orgasm even if I wanted do. Matvey won’t allow it. His thrusts grow harder as he rubs my clit and kisses me so damn sweetly. His other hand grips my inner thigh, keeping me spread open so he can go deeper, and when he feels me tense around him and the breathy moan that escapes my lips, he growls my name and lets go with me so we can come together.

He holds me tightly, fucking me through our orgasms while he pulses inside me, giving me everything he has. Even after he’s spent and I’m left gasping for air, ears ringing and muscles limp, he keeps our bodies locked together, holding me so there isn’t any space between us.

“I love you,” I whisper against his lips, already half-asleep. It’s still the middle of the night, and my body is giving out fast.

“I love you too, *malishka*.” He kisses me again and then pulls the blankets back over us, keeping himself buried inside me while I fall asleep.

The next time I wake, the sun is shining and Matvey and Finn are gone. Instead of the fear that would usually overtake me, I smile and stretch out my arms while memories of last night run through my head. Sitting up, I notice the note that Matvey left for me on his pillow.

Alina,

Finn and I are making you breakfast, so keep your cute ass in bed. We’ll be down soon.

I love you more than life itself, malishka.

Matvey

I’m still smiling about his note while I brush my teeth and use the bathroom. As soon as I crawl back into bed, my phone rings. When I see Roman’s name, I hurry up and pull on one of Matvey’s shirts before answering the FaceTime call.

“How’s my beautiful nephew doing?”

He laughs, and I love seeing him so happy. “He’s doing great. We survived the first night of being parents.”

Emily laughs in the background and Roman angles the camera so I can see my exhausted sister-in-law. She may be tired, but she’s beaming when she looks down at Luka snuggled in her arms. “Barely. I had no idea anyone could eat and go to the bathroom so many times.”

I laugh and then ooh and aah when I get a clear view of my nephew’s sweet face. He’s in a blue sleeper, looking unbelievably adorable. His green eyes look between his mom and dad, and it makes me so happy to know

that he'll never have the kind of childhood that we all had. He'll never come home from school and find his mom with bruises on her face because her latest boyfriend got pissed. He'll never have to deal with abuse of any kind or a hungry belly. He's going to be surrounded by people who love him and by people who will do anything to keep him safe.

"I know, Alina," Roman says in Russian, reading my expression when he turns the phone back around so I can see him. "He'll never have to go through what we did."

I'm hesitant to ask, but I force myself to say the words. "Have you heard from Mom lately?"

The sad look in his eyes isn't because he's heartbroken that our mom never really seemed to care about us; it's because he knows that what he's about to say is going to hurt me, and that's the last thing he wants to do.

"It's okay, Roman, just say it."

He sighs and then meets my eyes again. "I haven't heard from her in almost a year. The last time I talked to her, I told her about Emily and how we were still searching for you."

"She didn't care, did she?"

"It doesn't matter, Alina," he says, giving me a small smile. "We made our own family, remember? Fuck everyone else."

Even though I feel the ache at knowing my mom doesn't really give a shit about us, I still can't help but smile at my brother. Our mom has always been absent. She was forced to work a lot of hours, which we understood, but it was the long string of shit boyfriends that we had a harder time ignoring. Our dad died when I was just a baby, so the only memories I have of men were the jackasses she seemed to be attracted to. Roman is the one who took care of me, and he's right. We made our own family, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm so glad you're my big brother," I tell him, making his smile grow.

"Me, too, Alina." He turns his head a bit like he's trying to look past me. "Where's Matvey?"

"He's making me breakfast with Finn."

He gives another laugh when he sees the smile I can't hide. "I'm happy for you," he says. "We all are. There's no one else I'd rather see you with."

"He told me you gave him your permission."

"I did, and when the time comes, I can't wait to walk you down the aisle."

My eyes tear up at his words. “I love you, Roman.”

I swear his look just as glassy as mine. He smiles and nods his head towards his wife and son. “They’re making me soft.”

“What are you saying about me?” Emily asks, not understanding a word of what we’ve been saying.

Roman smiles at her and switches back to English. “I’m telling my sister that I’ve become a giant softie because of you two.”

Emily smiles at him. “Yeah, you have, and it’s adorable.” She darts her eyes to mine. “You should’ve seen him counting Luka’s toes last night. So freaking cute.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Roman says, but I can tell he’s not the slightest bit upset about being teased. He’s too busy being happier than I’ve ever seen him.

“Will you get to come home tomorrow?”

“Yeah, we’ll be back tomorrow evening.”

“Good, I can’t wait to hold him again. Give him a big kiss from me.”

“I will. We’ll see you tomorrow. Tell everyone we said hi. I’m going to put a bunch of photos in our group chat.”

“Please do. I can’t wait to see them. Love you guys.”

“Love you too,” they both say, giving me big smiles while Emily holds Luka’s little hand so he’s giving me a wave before they hang up.

“What are you smiling so big about?”

I look up right as Matvey walks in with Finn. He’s holding a large tray filled with food, and when he sets it down, my stomach gives a loud grumble. Matvey smiles and leans down to kiss me. He tastes like syrup, and when I suck on his tongue, he fists my hair and groans.

“You’ve been eating without me,” I tell him.

He gives me a guilty smile. “Just a bite. I had to make sure it was good.”

I pull him closer and kiss him again. “It’s very good,” I whisper against his sweet lips.

“I’d love to lay you down and slide right back into you, but first I have a present I want you to open.”

I watch him walk to the stash of presents in the closet, wondering what he’s up to.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 18

Matvey

Her eyes stay on me, but she still slips Finn a piece of bacon. He's already eaten a bowl of dogfood, a few treats because Simona and Jolene felt he deserved them for looking so damn cute while I cooked breakfast, and the half-slice of bacon that he already got from me because, yeah, he did look damn cute sitting there with his head cocked to the side while I made waffles. Still, he takes the food and trots off to his bed, more than happy to eat some more.

I turn my attention back to Alina. She looks beautiful with her sleep-ruffled hair, in nothing but my shirt, and a sexy glint in her eyes. They're more blue than green today, and when they search my face, I smile. She always was impatient.

"Tell me what you were smiling about when I came in."

She gets on her knees and then sits back on her heels, grabbing a strawberry from the tray. Before she takes a bite, she says, "Roman FaceTimed me. Luka looks just as cute as he did yesterday. They're coming home tomorrow, and he's going to put a bunch of photos in the group chat later."

She chews the strawberry, and I smile down at her. Just the simple act of seeing her eat makes me so damn happy. She's come so far since we got her back, and every day she amazes me with how strong she is. I hold the small box out to her.

"What's this?"

I nod my head back towards the closet. "You still have a lot to open in there, *malishka*, but this one can't wait."

She takes the box right before I lift her up and sit her on the edge of the bed so I can kneel between her legs. Raising a brow at me, she gives me a small smile and pulls the thin ribbon free. I don't rush her, letting her take her time with the wrapping paper until she's holding a black, velvet box.

"Matvey," she whispers, wrapping her hands around it like the damn box is the gift and not what's inside.

I laugh and cover her hands with mine. "I bought this shortly after you were taken. I was walking around Moscow, trying like hell to find you. I hadn't slept in days or eaten anything, and I could barely function, and then I'd stopped in front of a store, leaning against the wall for support. When I'd turned my head, I'd seen a display case filled with jewelry. It killed me to see it, because I wanted to buy and give you all of it, but I couldn't."

Her eyes are already glassy, and when I gently open the box, revealing the ring inside, the tears start to fall.

"That's when I saw this. I knew in my heart that it was meant for you. It gave me hope, Alina, at a moment when I didn't have any. I forced myself to believe that one day I'd find you, that I'd be able to get on my knees and beg you to marry me, because I never want to experience life without you again."

I kiss her shaking hands. "I couldn't bear it. I love you, Alina. You're the only woman I've ever loved, the only woman I will ever love, and all I want is to spend my life with you. I want to love you and protect you and care for you. I want a family with you when you're ready, and I want to grow old by your side."

She cups my face, not even bothering to wipe away the tears that are now streaming down her cheeks. I lean into her touch and kiss the palm of her hand.

"You are everything to me, and you're all I want. In this life and in however many come after, I will always find you, because you and I are meant to be together. I can't breathe unless you're taking in the same air, and my heart doesn't beat unless yours beats with it."

She bites her bottom lip to keep them from trembling and squeezes my hand.

"Will you marry me, Alina?"

"Yes." That one word whispered in a breathy rush makes me happier than I ever thought possible. "Yes, I'll marry you." She lets out a soft laugh

and adds, “There’s never a time in my life when I wouldn’t have said yes to that question, by the way.”

I smile and kiss her hand before taking the ring out of the box and slipping it on her finger. The large diamond on the delicate platinum band looks just as good on her finger as I always imagined it would. So many nights I laid awake, imagining this very moment, terrified that it would never happen, and now that it has, I want to wrap my arms around her and never let her go. When I lift my eyes to hers, mine are glassy and my throat feels tight.

“Matvey,” she whispers, cupping my face and pulling me closer. “I love you.”

“I love you too, *malishka*.”

I watch her sweet look turn ravenous right before she kisses me hard, sucking my tongue into her mouth and wrapping her legs around my waist as she tries to pull me up onto the bed with her. I laugh and manage to say, “You still need to eat breakfast,” around the hungry kiss she’s giving me.

“After,” she moans, tugging on my shirt and trying to yank it off me.

I lift up just enough for her to undress me, unable to deny my fiancée anything. She pulls at the joggers I’m wearing, sliding them over my ass before digging her fingers into my cheeks and making me laugh again.

“Laugh all you want, Matvey. I’ve been admiring this ass my whole life, and now I finally get to touch it any damn time I want.”

I hover my lips over hers while she uses her feet to shove my pants down the rest of the way, leaving me naked and her in nothing but my T-shirt. Snaking a hand under it, I run my fingers up her side before cupping one of her tits.

“You can touch any part of me any damn time you want, *malishka*.”

“Finally,” she says with a laugh before running her fingers through my hair and closing the distance.

Shoving her shirt up, I let it bunch at her neck, groaning at the feel of her naked body against mine. Her legs are already wrapped around me, wet pussy pressing against my hard cock, and when I angle my hips so I can slide back into her, she moans my name and kisses me harder.

A deep sense of peace washes over me when I slide into her, just like it always does, reminding me that I’m exactly where I was always meant to be, and I never want to leave. No matter how deep I get, no matter how

tightly our bodies lock together, it never feels like enough. I'm always craving and needing more. I'll never be able to get enough of her.

When she moans my name as her body shatters beneath me, I follow her. I'd follow her anywhere. Whether it's to heaven when our bodies are locked together, both of us lost in the other, or to the darkest corners of hell where we've already been forced to spend too much goddamn time—it doesn't matter. If she's there, then I'm there. It's as simple as that.

I wrap my arms even tighter around her so I can feel the beat of her heart thundering against mine while I breathe her in, filling my lungs with her sweet scent. Tremors run through her body as I kiss her slowly, savoring the taste and feel of her.

"You're all I've ever wanted, Matvey."

I smile at her words and kiss her again. "You have me, *malishka*, always, and I'm never letting you go."

* * *

6 Months Later

"Is this not the cutest damn thing you've ever seen or what?"

I laugh at Roman's excited face when he looks down at his son. Luka's wearing the tiniest tux I've ever seen—green eyes lit up with a big smile on his face, proudly showing off his first baby tooth.

"It is," I say, making Danil shoot me a deeply offended look as he holds his own son in his arms. "Don't worry." I laugh and smile down at Maxim in his blue-and-white striped onesie. When his grey eyes find mine, he grins around his pacifier while I give another soft laugh. "He's just as cute. All my nephews are perfect."

"And your niece," Lev says, walking over with his daughter in his arms. Natalya is dressed in her pink onesie, the one with the attached pink tutu that has *Daddy's Little Princess* written on the chest, and she's looking up at her dad like he's her whole world. She smiles even bigger when he looks down at her and gives her a wink.

"My niece is adorable and perfect, too," I say, reaching out to tickle her stomach. "You've got your daddy wrapped around your little finger, don't you, Natalya?"

“Hell yeah she does,” Lev says with a laugh. He lifts her up so he can kiss her cheek. “Who’s daddy’s little princess?” He blows a raspberry on her cheek, making her laugh even harder. It’s still odd to see my tough, tattooed and pierced brother baby talking, but there’s no denying he’s completely smitten by his daughter. He’s very hands-on with her, and I have no doubt that one day I’ll be walking in on him playing dolls and having tea parties. I laugh at the image and shake my head.

“What’s so funny?” Vitaly asks, walking over to us while he adjusts the collar of his tux.

“Just thinking about all the tea parties Lev’s going to be having,” I tell him.

“I’ll have as many tea parties as she wants me to have.” Lev kisses his daughter’s cheek before tucking her back against him. With her dark hair and light blue eyes, she looks like his smaller, sweeter, un-inked twin.

“God, I can’t wait for the twins to get here,” Vitaly says, looking at all the babies. Katya is due in a couple of weeks, and I know she’s more than ready to have the pregnancy over with. When they’d found out they were having a boy *and* a girl, it had been one hell of a shock. Then, of course, it had been weeks of Vitaly gloating about being the only one of us able to make two babies at one time.

When I look over, he’s giving me that same smug grin. “Did I mention I put two babies in Katya’s belly?”

I laugh and shake my head at him. “You might have mentioned that a time or two.”

“Or a million,” Danil adds.

Vitaly smiles. “Don’t be jealous because my cock is so powerful it made two babies at once.”

“Language, Vitaly,” Lev says, holding a hand over Natalya’s ear.

Roman lifts a brow at a still very smug looking Vitaly. “You do know that’s not how that works, right?”

Vitaly laughs. “You keep telling yourself that, brother.”

Roman points a finger at him, trying to look mad. “Don’t push it. I’m still pissed at you for the Porsche prank you played on me.”

Vitaly laughs. “I gave it back.”

“After two months!” Roman shakes his head, still pissed but unable to stop smiling at the prank that, if we’re being honest, was one of Vitaly’s best yet.

I’m still laughing when Dominic walks over to us. Alina and I are going to have a wedding party next week with the Bratva, but we wanted our vows to be private with just family to witness it. Dominic’s our one and only guest, but it felt right to have him here today. He’s been a regular visitor since he took Lars on a little trip to Italy. Like me, he was obsessed with getting his revenge, but we both know that killing the men responsible doesn’t make everything go away. He’s still left with the loss of his sister, but I can tell that ending Lars’s life has brought him a little bit of peace, which isn’t much, but it’s more than he had before.

“How’s Antonio?” I ask him.

“Enjoying Italy. I’m flying out tomorrow to join him for a few months. Try to behave yourselves while I’m gone. I’d hate to come back to a city that’s in complete chaos.”

“No promises,” Vitaly says with a laugh.

When Natalya lets out a squeal and reaches for Dominic, I see the man visibly stiffen beside me. “What’s she doing?” He eyes her like he has no idea what to make of her.

Lev laughs and holds her out to him. “She wants her Uncle Dominic.”

The smug grin on Lev’s face has Dominic grimacing and holding his hands up. “I don’t know how to hold a kid.”

“Better learn quick,” I tell him as Lev presses his daughter against Dominic’s tux so he has no choice but to wrap his hands around her. He holds her so one hand is under her butt and his other hand is splayed out across her stomach, keeping her back pressed tightly against his chest. She turns her head so she can see him. Her light blue eyes follow every move he makes, and when she gives him a big, gummy smile, the corner of his mouth lifts up the tiniest bit.

“You spoil her,” he says in his slight Italian accent.

“Always,” Lev says, smiling at his daughter. “She’s my little princess.”

“*Principessa*,” Dominic murmurs, flicking a finger over Natalya’s pink tutu. “Just wait until your little princess is a teenager. You keep spoiling her, she’s going to be a nightmare.”

Lev scowls at Dominic before smiling at his daughter. “You’re not going to be a spoiled brat, are you, Princess?”

Natalya laughs at her dad’s baby talking, her eyes darting between the two men. She lets out another squeal and wraps her hand around one of

Dominic's fingers. Vitaly snaps a quick photo of the two of them, laughing when Dominic raises a brow at him.

"What?" Vitaly asks with a laugh. "You need to get used to all this anyway."

"I need to get used to this because of all the babies I *won't* be having?" Dominic asks.

Danil laughs and kisses his son's cheek. "Yeah, we all said that once too."

Natalya looks between all of us and then puts her blue eyes back on Dominic and smiles.

"She likes you," Lev says. "Clearly she's not the best judge of character. That's something we're going to have to work on."

"Well, she's enamored with you," Dominic says, "so there's really no accounting for taste."

"You know I can't hit you while you're holding my daughter." Lev smiles back at Natalya and reaches out for her. She smiles and kicks her legs while Lev baby talks. "But he's not going to be holding you all night, is he, Princess?"

Dominic smiles and lifts Natalya up so he can whisper in her ear, "I saved your daddy's life, *principessa*."

Lev groans but can't help laughing. Natalya giggles while Dominic hands her over and then brushes the jacket of his tux to smooth out the wrinkles her wriggling body had created. He's still working on it when Emily walks up to us. She looks over at me, tears already threatening to spill over when she says, "She's ready, Matvey."

She gives me a quick hug, something I've been slowly getting better about, and then takes Luka from Roman, giving her son a big smile when he lunges for her. Roman kisses her and then smacks my shoulder before leaving the veranda and going back inside so he can walk his sister down the aisle.

Dominic walks over to the seat we set out for him while Jolene and Simona walk out, smiling at me and then taking their places next to Emily and opposite where I'm standing with Vitaly, Danil, and Lev. Katya follows closely behind, giving Vitaly a quick wink and me a big smile. She looks like she's about to give birth any second. Alina had picked black bridesmaid dresses that aren't tight around the waist, but even then it had to be

specially altered to accommodate the very pregnant belly. Vitaly had looked so damn proud when he'd heard that.

"Ready, brother?" I hear him ask from right behind me. All my brothers are my best men, and that's why they'll be lining up shoulder to shoulder behind me instead of one in front of the other. I wouldn't be here today, minutes away from marrying the love of my life, if it weren't for every single one of them. They got me through the worst two years of my life, and then Roman took a bullet so I didn't have to. I owe them everything, and I can't imagine my life without any one of them. They're my family, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm ready," I tell them, knowing I've never been more ready for anything in my life.

When I hear one of my sisters-in-law give a soft gasp, I turn my head and get my first glimpse of Alina in her wedding dress. My breath catches in my throat at the sight of her, and all I can do is stare. Her blue-green eyes meet mine while she squeezes Roman's arm and walks slowly towards me. Her long, dark hair is hanging loose like she knows I love it, and I want to memorize every single detail of this moment. The wedding dress she chose is strapless, and she's wearing the diamond and ruby necklace and earrings that I'd bought for her while she was gone. She's beautiful, absolutely stunning, and I can hardly believe that she's mine.

Finn trots at her feet, and I can't help but laugh when I see what he's wearing. I had no idea they made tuxes for dogs, but he's in one, and he looks downright handsome. Alina turns her head to give Dominic a smile as she walks past before turning her eyes back to mine. She's stunning, and I can't look away. The last six months have been the best of my life, and I know it's only going to get better once she's my wife. Seeing the engagement ring on her finger isn't good enough. I want to see a wedding band. Her last name won't be changing since we're all going by Melnikov now, but I need the marriage certificate, the wedding vows, and the wedding bands. I want and need everything with her.

Roman and Alina stop just a few feet in front of me, and when she turns to look at her brother, the first tears start to fall. She throws her arms around him and pulls him in for a big hug. I can already hear all the bridesmaids sniffling. Roman whispers something in Alina's ear that makes her nod her head and squeeze him harder. When he lets her go, he grabs her hand

between his and with a big smile, he kisses the back of it and then places her hand in mine.

Leaning closer so only I can hear, he says, “You’re the only man I would ever trust to keep her safe, Matvey. I know you’ll love her and take care of her like she deserves.” His hand squeezes my shoulder when he says, “I’m so happy for the two of you.”

He walks back to stand beside our brothers while I tighten my grip on Alina’s hand and try not to break down in front of everyone.

“You look so beautiful, *malishka*,” I whisper, running my eyes over every inch of her. She’s gained back the weight she’d lost, and her skin has a healthy glow to it. She’s come so far, and I’m so damn proud of her. She still meets with Dr. Taylor every now and then, but things are getting better for her. Every day seems to bring her further and further into the light and away from the darkness she’d been forced to endure. I’m going to do everything I can to make sure she never spends a day in the dark again.

With our eyes locked on one another and her small hand in mine, we recite our vows in front of our family. When it’s time to slide the band around Alina’s finger, I feel like we’re finally where we’re supposed to be, because she was always meant to be my wife. She knew it long before I did, but we were always destined to end up right here. She’s mine, always has been and always will be.

Cupping her smiling face, I lean down and kiss my wife. She threads her fingers through my hair, pulling me closer, and when our lips touch, everything else disappears. The two years of hell, the fear and horror and heartache, the constant pain in my chest and feeling like I couldn’t breathe —all of it fades away, because the love we feel for one another won’t allow it in.

“I love you,” I whisper against her lips.

“I love you, too,” she whispers back, and then everyone is cheering and hugging us, and I don’t even mind all the physical contact. Alina makes it better. She makes everything better, so I hug my family and keep one arm firmly wrapped around my wife, knowing there’s no way in hell I will ever be parted from her again.

We hired the same photographer that Vitaly had hired for his after-wedding photos. He still looks scared of us, but he’s decided he likes the money we pay way more than he cares about his fear. My face is aching from smiling so damn much, and I can tell he’s not even close to being

done. We have several group shots taken, forcing Dominic into several of them, and then he puts the two of us on the swing we have on the veranda with Luka, Maxim, and Natalya.

“Hold still, Max,” I say, laughing when he keeps trying to wiggle around. Luka sits on my other thigh while Natalya sits in her aunt’s lap, looking every bit like the well-behaved princess she is. Several of the shots are probably of me just trying to wrangle the two boys into position, but we do manage to land a few where everyone is looking at the camera and smiling.

Finn is in all the photos, looking every bit like the integral part of the family he is. He’s protective of the kids, but his eyes never stray from Alina for long. His fiercely protective nature with her mirrors my own, and it’s created an understanding between us. We’d both die to protect her, no matter what.

I reach down and pet his head, scratching behind his ears just like he likes before I grab my wife and pull her against me for our first dance. I know everyone is watching us, but I don’t give a fuck. All I can see is Alina, looking so goddamn beautiful it makes my chest ache.

“I can’t believe you’re finally my wife.”

She plays with the back of my hair while we sway gently to the music, smiling up at me. “I can’t believe you’re my husband.” She laughs and shakes her head. “I think the first time I imagined our wedding I was nine. There were a lot of white horses involved, and there may have been a castle. I was reading a lot of fairy tales at the time.”

I laugh and kiss her. “I hope you think the wait was worth it. There might not be any horses or a castle, but we do have Finn and a penthouse.”

She smiles. “Even better.” Resting her cheek against mine, she whispers, “This feels every bit like a fairy tale. One of the good ones,” she quickly adds, “not one of the many Russian ones that end with tragedy.”

“We’ve had enough of that to last a lifetime, Alina. It’s time for our happy ending, and this is only the beginning, *malishka*. I plan on spoiling you for the rest of your life, so prepare yourself.”

I feel her smile against my cheek before she kisses it. “I have everything I need right here.”

“Me too, baby, me too.”

We dance until Roman comes and steals her away. I rock Luka to sleep and watch as each of my brothers takes a turn. She laughs when Dominic

joins in and pulls her away from Lev, spinning her around and teaching her what must be some Italian dance I've never seen before. I look at her smiling face, memorizing every detail and knowing I'll do everything I can to make sure she's always this happy. She deserves the world, and I want nothing more than to give it to her.

When I've waited on the sidelines long enough, I give my sleeping nephew back to Emily, kissing his small head before walking across the dance floor to reclaim my wife.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to wait much longer," Vitaly says with a laugh. He's the one who's currently dancing with Alina, so he gives her a hug and then spins her around so she lands in my arms, right where she belongs.

I look down at her smiling face and cup her cheek, running the pad of my thumb along her skin. She leans into my touch, just like she always does, and sneaks a quick kiss when my thumb grazes her bottom lip.

I recognize the look she's giving me, and when my smile grows, she gives a soft laugh. Threading my fingers through her hair, I pull her closer so our lips are almost touching.

"Not too much longer, *malishka*."

One of her fingers slips below the collar of my tux and runs along my skin while her other hand slides inside my jacket to grip my hip, reminding me that this is our wedding, and we can sneak away if we want to.

"You're right, baby. I don't know what the hell I was thinking."

Her smile grows when I wrap an arm around her waist and lead her off the dance floor. She motions for Finn to stay where he's at, lying on the dog bed that's closest to where Lev is holding Natalya. Without a word, we start to walk back inside. I'm not at all surprised when Vitaly meets us with a grin on his face.

"Where are you two going?"

"Matvey's going to help me with something," Alina says, looking everywhere but at Vitaly. "We'll be right back."

Vitaly laughs and smacks my shoulder. Before he walks by, he says, "Take your time. I'll keep everyone entertained while you're gone."

"I don't doubt that for a second."

He laughs, and before we turn to leave, I see him grab Katya and yell, "Look at my beautiful, pregnant wife! Come on, *ptichka*, let's dance you into an early labor. I'm ready to meet our babies."

She laughs, knowing he's not going to tolerate her dancing for more than a few minutes before he's going to demand she sit down and rest with her feet up. He's done what he said he was going to do, though, and all the attention is on them as Alina and I sneak inside.

Pulling her downstairs, I pick her up and carry her into our room. As soon as I set her on the bed, she's reaching for my zipper, but fast is the last thing I want. She sees the look on my face and smiles.

"I promise we'll take our time later, but right now I need you inside me, Matvey."

With a groan, I slide my hands up her thighs, bunching her dress up and exposing the white thigh highs she's wearing. By the time I get to the matching lacy, white panties, I'm so hard I'm straining against my pants.

Lifting up, she works my zipper, freeing my cock and pulling a deep groan from me when she runs her hand along my shaft. Gripping me tightly, she pulls me towards her, spreading her thighs wider before using her other hand to shove her panties aside. The sight of her bare, wet pussy has my dick swelling even more in her grip.

I brace my hands on either side of her, letting her guide me between her legs. The birth control shot she'd been on is out of her system, but she hasn't gotten pregnant yet. The doctor said it could take a while, and we both believe that it'll happen when it's supposed to happen. For now, we're just having fun with it.

She moans my name when I start to slide into her and reaches up to cup my face and pull me closer so she can kiss me. Before she does, she whispers, "I love you, Matvey," completely undoing me with those four words as her tongue finds mine and she kisses me like she'll never be able to stop.

It's heaven being with her, and nothing else will ever compare to it. I bury myself inside my wife, not wanting any distance between us, and I show her just how much I love her. I worship her body. Every thrust, every stroke, every kiss shows her how damn much I love her and need her, because she's everything to me, every goddamn thing, and I'm going to remind her of that every day for the rest of our lives.

I can't imagine a better way to spend my life.

OceanofPDF.com

Epilogue

One Year Later
Alina

"She's so beautiful." I look down at our gorgeous, dark-eyed daughter, amazed at how much I love her. I'm still reeling from this overwhelming, unconditional love that hit me as soon as the doctor put her in my arms.

"She is," Matvey says, and I smile at the awe in his voice.

My strong, tattooed husband is looking at our daughter with tears in his eyes, and when he leans closer to kiss her tiny head, I start crying even harder because I'm too damn happy to contain it all. He gives me a sweet smile and kisses me gently.

"I'm so proud of you, *malishka.* You never cease to amaze me."

"I didn't have much of a choice," I remind him. "She was coming no matter what."

"But you handled it beautifully." He gives me a wink. "You make a gorgeous mom, baby."

I smile at how sweet he is and run my finger along our daughter's cheek. She immediately tries to nurse, so I pull her closer and get her situated. Matvey watches, a grin playing at his lips as he sees me feed our daughter.

"I didn't think I could get any happier," he admits.

I reach out and squeeze his hand. "I didn't either."

Yelena looks up at me while she nurses, her eyes the same dark shade as her daddy's, and all I can think about is how damn grateful I am. I may have had to go through hell to get here, but none of that matters anymore. I no longer have nightmares and Konstantin's voice no longer haunts my mind. I'm free of him, and anytime the memories threaten to come back, Finn is right there with his big, furry head in my lap, or Matvey is picking me up and reminding me that I'm his and that I'm safe.

The life I have is better than I could've ever imagined, and I wouldn't change a single thing about it. Matvey scoots in closer, wrapping an arm around my shoulder as we watch Yelena. As soon as we found out we were having a girl, Matvey had asked if I'd mind naming her after his sister. I'd smiled and said it was perfect, and it is. It's the perfect way to honor the aunt she'll never get to meet.

Matvey runs his thumb over my wrist, the scarred pad tracing the lines of the tattoo I'd gotten after my wrist had healed. I'd tried to slice off the black viper ouroboros, leaving an unsightly scar that I wasn't quite sure what to do about. Matvey's scarred, tattooed body had inspired me to tattoo over it—this time one of my own choosing. We'd found a skilled tattoo artist who had the expertise and was willing to spend the time making sure it was exactly how I wanted it. Now, instead of a mangled, old tattoo and a vicious scar, there's a beautiful phoenix circling my wrist—a vibrant bracelet of fiery reds and oranges. Every time I look at it it's a vivid reminder that sometimes you can rise from the ashes and be even better than before. Fire doesn't always have to end in death, and our tragedies don't always have to define us.

Yelena gives a soft sigh, letting go of my breast as her eyes drift closed. Matvey laughs and reaches for her small body.

"I think she wants her daddy," he says, picking her up and holding her against his broad chest so he can pat her back. She looks so cute and tiny in her pink sleeper, cuddled up with her head nestled by his neck.

“I can’t say I blame her.” I fix my shirt and watch them, my family, my whole world.

Matvey smiles at me, and wraps his other arm around my shoulders, pulling me closer. “I have everything I could ever want or need right here. As long as I have you two, I have everything.”

I bring my head closer to his and kiss him before resting against him. I put my hand on top of his so we’re both touching our daughter. He’s right. As long as I have the two of them, I have everything.

My body is exhausted from the labor and delivery, and when my eyes start to drift shut, Matvey kisses my head and strokes my hair.

“Get some sleep, *malishka*. You’re going to need it. Everyone will be in later to meet Yelena. Roman’s already texted me a million times to see how you’re doing, and they all think she’s absolutely gorgeous. He also said Finn is doing great and anxious to meet her.”

I smile at the thought of our huge family crowding into the room to meet our daughter. He’s right, I’m going to need all the sleep I can get.

“I love you, Matvey,” I whisper, my eyes too heavy to keep them open.

“I love you too, baby.” I can hear the smile in his voice when he says, “I’ll watch over my girls and make sure everything is taken care of.”

And I know he will. No matter what, Yelena and I will always be loved and protected. Nothing can hurt us as long as we’re together. With my heart full and my mind at peace, I fall asleep in my husband’s arms.

* * *

Matvey

I watch Alina fall into a deep sleep while Yelena breathes softly against my neck, and I can’t stop smiling. There were so many days, so many sleepless nights, were I convinced myself that this moment would never come, but it’s here. It’s finally fucking here.

Turning my head, I kiss our daughter, breathing in her sweet scent and feeling the silky, dark strands of her hair against my face. She’s perfect, absolutely perfect in every way. When she starts to wiggle around, I very carefully move my arm from around Alina so I can lay Yelena down in front of me. She’s nestled between my thighs, snug in her pink sleeper, and when

she opens her eyes, the first thing she sees is her daddy grinning like an idiot.

“Hi, sweetie,” I say in Russian, wanting her to know the native language of her parents. It’s important to both of us that she speaks both English and Russian.

I run my finger over her soft cheek, amazed at every inch of her. When I first held her, I’d been afraid my scarred hands and rough voice would upset her, but she doesn’t seem to mind them at all, and when she grabs onto my finger, I can’t help but give a soft laugh. Her dark eyes study me, and even though we share the same eyes, I see so much of Alina in her. She’s the perfect mix of the two of us.

“Daddy loves you so much,” I whisper.

She kicks her feet and keeps a tight grip on my finger and smiles up at me. When I think about how dangerous the world is, it makes me want to wrap her in my arms and never let go, but I know I can’t do that. It wouldn’t be fair to her. I want her to live her life and enjoy it. I want her to be as happy as her mom and I are. I want everything for her, but the truth is that we’ve brought a baby into a Bratva family, and danger will always be a part of her life. My brothers and I will do everything to keep our family safe, but we all know how quickly things can change. We lost one of our own once, and we’ll be damned if it happens again. Never again will anyone in our family be taken. She may be a part of a dangerous family, but that also means she has me, four uncles, and several cousins who will be watching over her and keeping her safe, not to mention an entire goddamn Bratva. No one is going to get their hands on my precious daughter. I’ll kill any motherfucker who dares to try.

When Yelena flares her arms and legs out again, I smile and caress the soft hair on her head.

“No one will ever hurt you, sweetheart. Daddy will kill anyone who tries.”

She smiles at my whispered baby talk, and the look in her eyes is one of absolute trust and love, and I know I’ll do everything I can to make sure she always looks at me like that.

My family is everything, and I’ll do anything to protect them.

Picking my daughter back up, I nestle her against my chest and put my other arm back around my wife, because I want to hold them both while they sleep. My whole world is in my arms right now, and I never want to let

them go, so I'll happily hold them for as long as I can. I kiss my wife's head and then my daughter's, and I feel completely at peace.

OceanofPDF.com

Extended Epilogue

Five Years Later
Matvey

Evgeny runs over to me with a big smile on his cute face, and when I open my arms, my three-year-old son comes barreling into them with a laugh. He wraps his arms and legs around me, laughing when I spin him around.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

I look over and smile at Yelena. I can’t believe my little girl is already five. She’s growing too damn fast. Leaning down, I scoop them both into my arms while she clutches at my neck and kisses my cheek. She’s wearing her favorite red hoodie because she loves to dress like her daddy.

“Have you two been good for Mommy?”

Her dark eyes sparkle when she smiles and nods her head. “Evgeny and I helped bake cookies.”

“You made cookies?”

They both laugh at my excitement. Evgeny keeps up a steady stream of Russian, telling me all about his day, and when he stops to take a breath, Yelena puts her focus on me.

“Everyone’s coming over later, so Mommy’s been cooking a bunch. Val and Sveta will be here!”

I smile at her excited voice. Vitaly’s twins, Svetlana and Valentin, are only a year older than Yelena, and she’s always gotten along well with them. All the cousins get along, actually, which has been great for the adults. Altogether, there’s eleven kids now, which means we’re always busy with something. When the penthouse became too crowded, we branched out a bit. Roman and Emily stayed at the original penthouse, while the rest of us found others nearby. We all live within a few minutes of each other, and that’s how we like it. Danil purchased a huge house on fifty acres of land that’s a little over an hour away for all of us to share. We all try to meet up there a couple of times a month. The kids love it, and it’s good for them to run around and play outside. Finn also loves it, and with him, plus all the security we’ve installed, it’s a safe place we can all go to relax and leave the Bratva business in the city.

I step further into our apartment, eager to see my wife. Everywhere I look there are photos of our smiling family looking back at me. At first it’s just Alina and me, and then it’s us with a smiling Yelena, and then finally the four of us. Mixed in are framed photos of my brothers and their families. No matter what’s going on with our Bratva, stepping into my home always brings a smile to my face. Everything else fades away when I’m surrounded by my family.

Walking into the living room, I smile at the wall of bookcases that are filled with Alina’s favorite books. She still has the book I found for her when she was ten and the set I bought her for her eighteenth birthday. They’re on a special shelf next to one of our family photos.

Yelena runs her hand over my scarred neck. Her small, curious fingers never shy away from the marks on my body. She and Evgeny are familiar with the scars on both their parents. Neither one of them has ever given the slightest care about them. They don’t see it as an imperfection or something ugly that needs to be hidden; they just see their parents, the people who love them more than life itself.

I kiss both their cheeks and tell them I love them before setting them down so they can run off and play. Evgeny immediately runs to the pile of

blocks he’s busy constructing a building out of, and Yelena grabs the Kindle we got her for Christmas, because she’s just like her mom and loves to read. Seeing that they're safe and occupied, I walk into the kitchen, leaning against the doorway so I can watch my wife. Finn’s sitting at her feet, because even though she doesn’t need him quite like she used to, he’s never far from her.

My eyes run over the cute, red dress she’s wearing, and when I see she’s painted her toes a matching red color, I bite back a groan and feel my cock start to harden. Her back is to me, but I’m not at all surprised she’s noticed I’m staring at her. She gives a soft laugh and looks over her shoulder.

“You going to just stand there and stare at me all night?” Her blue-green eyes are lit up with amusement when she runs her eyes over me just like I’d been doing to her a second ago. I know she can see the evidence of what she does to me.

“I’m definitely not going to just stare at you all night.” I push off from the doorway and slowly walk towards her. When we’re only inches apart, I lean closer and brush my nose along her neck, breathing in the scent of her. The whole penthouse smells like cookies, but nothing smells as sweet as my wife.

I nip at her soft skin. “I’ve missed you, *malishka*.”

She reaches up and cups the back of my head, running her hands through my hair. “I’ve missed you, too.”

No matter how many times I’ve fucked my wife, it will never be enough. I never stop craving her or wanting her or needing her, and I never will. Running my hands down her body, I cup her ass and pick her up while she lets out a soft laugh against my neck.

“Go watch the kids, Finn,” she says, and he immediately trots off to lay on his bed in the living room so he can see both the kids at once. One of the many perks to having a highly trained dog. “Everyone will be here soon,” she reminds me while I kiss her neck and walk her into the large pantry, shutting the door behind me. This isn’t the first time we’ve used it for a quickie, and it’s easily one of my favorite rooms. Every time I walk in here to get something to eat, I’m surrounded by so many amazing memories. The kids probably think I’m crazy for always smiling so big every time I get their morning cereal for them.

“We’d better be quick then,” I tell her before sucking the skin at the crook of her neck.

“Not too fast,” she whispers, making me smile. “Put me down, Matvey.”

I give her ass one last squeeze and then lower her down so she’s standing in front of me. She reaches for my jeans and starts to undo them, pulling a groan from me when she reaches in and grabs my dick, pulling it free before lowering her head and swiping her tongue along my crown.

“Fuck, baby,” I growl, fisting her hair in my hands as she kisses and licks my cock before wrapping her lips around me and sucking me in. I have to bite my lip to keep from groaning too loudly as she sinks lower onto me, taking me all the way in and leaving me fucking breathless. My fingers tighten in her hair, but I make sure to keep it soft enough so she’s still in control. That’s the way she likes it, and I’m more than happy to give her any damn thing she wants.

The wet heat of her mouth threatens to undo me, but as much as I love coming down her throat, that’s not what I want right now. I want to be buried inside her pussy. Running my fingers down her face, I caress the soft skin of her cheek, feeling her mouth work as she sucks me hard, but when I tap the bottom of her chin, she slowly slides her way off me. She knows what I want, and the way she quickly stands back up and pulls her panties off has me smiling. She wants me buried deep inside her just as badly as I want it.

I run my hands up her thighs before cupping her perfect, bare ass. “You drive me crazy, *malishka*.” I pick her up and press the head of my cock against her very wet slit, keeping my eyes locked on hers as I very slowly slide into her.

“Matvey,” she whispers, clenching me so goddamn tightly as I sink into her.

“I’ve got you.” I run my tongue over the seam of her lips, gently parting them as I bottom out inside her. “I’ve always got you.”

She grips my shoulders and deepens the kiss as I slowly lift her off me before thrusting in deep again. The whimper she lets out has me smiling against her hungry mouth.

“Better be quiet, *malishka*,” I tease, thrusting into her again and then laughing at the look she gives me.

“It’s hard to be quiet when you’ve got a giant cock slamming into you.”

I nip at her bottom lip. “Do you want me to stop?”

She laughs and whispers, “Never,” before kissing me hard so I can help muffle the moans and whimpers we both know she won’t be able to hold back.

I know we need to hurry, but, god, I never want to leave her beautiful body. Every time I slide into her, I lose myself completely. Her legs are wrapped around me, her hands fisting my hair, her mouth hungrily claiming mine, and her pussy is gripping me so fucking tightly. It’s perfect. *She’s* perfect, and I never want to be anywhere else.

When I feel her body start to tense, I speed my hips up even more, hitting her right where she needs me to, and as soon as I feel her inner walls spasm around my cock and the wetness of her release, I growl her name and let go, following her right over the edge. She whimpers against my lips, feeling each pulse of my cock as I fill her with everything I have. Her breaths are fast against my mouth when I pull back just enough to catch my own breath before giving a soft laugh.

“I love you so much, *malishka*.”

She smiles and cups my face, running her thumb over my stubbled cheek. “I love you, Matvey. I always have, and I always will.”

I rest my forehead against hers, savoring this moment, knowing it can’t last much longer. I’m just about to slide out of her when I hear Vitaly’s loud voice.

“Hey, Evgeny and Yelena! How are my favorite niece and nephew?”

I can’t help but laugh because he says that to all his nieces and nephews, and then I shake my head. “We should have never given him a key.”

Alina laughs and then lets out another sexy whimper when I slowly slide her off me. She looks down at my wet cock before lowering her head again.

“Jesus Christ,” I groan when she runs her tongue up my still semi-hard shaft. I watch my wife clean my dick, and by the time she’s done, I’m hard again and more than ready to spend the night in the damn pantry. When she’s satisfied, she stands and gives me a smug grin.

I cup her face and kiss her hard, sucking our juices from her tongue until we’re both breathing hard again.

“This isn’t over, *malishka*,” I whisper, pressing my hard cock against her stomach. “I hope you weren’t expecting to get much sleep tonight.”

She smiles and shakes her head. “I can take a nap tomorrow.”

I laugh and kiss her once more before she reaches down to get her panties. I'm just zipping up my pants when I hear Vitaly walk into the kitchen. I groan and kiss Alina while helping her fix her dress, and by the time we open the pantry door and step out, Vitaly is leaning against the island, helping himself to the appetizers and giving us a very smug grin.

"Need to go food hunting?" He makes a show of running his eyes over us, noticing that we aren't holding anything. "Guess you didn't find what you were looking for."

I ignore his taunts and the laugh he gives. "I see you used the key we gave you that was strictly for emergencies."

He laughs even harder and grabs another handful of chips. "We did knock first."

"I'm so sorry," Katya says, coming in with a casserole dish filled with something that smells amazing. "I told him to wait, but you know how he is."

"I do know exactly how he is," I say, leaning down to kiss Alina before giving her ass a soft swat and then winking at her when she gives me the look that says I'm supposed to be behaving.

"Uncle Matvey! Aunt Alina!"

We both turn to see Val running in followed closely by Sveta. The twins throw their arms around us, giving us a group hug, and I'm going to be so sad when the day comes when they no longer do this. They're six now, so I'm hoping we still have several more years of exuberant hugs.

"Hey, how are you two?"

They both look up at me. Their faces are so similar, but Val has his mom's blue eyes, and Sveta's are the same whiskey-brown as her dad's. She also shares his shit-eating grin, and I have a feeling she's going to be a handful when she hits her teenage years. I laugh every time I think about it. Vitaly's going to be getting a taste of his own medicine.

"We're good, Uncle Matvey," Sveta says, and then she looks at Alina. "Can I give Finn a treat?"

Alina smiles down at her niece. "Sure you can, sweetie. You know where they are."

Sveta grabs her brother's hand and runs to get a treat before bolting out of the kitchen again.

"The others should be here soon," I tell Alina, "so I'll go ahead and get started on the hamburgers."

She smiles at me before she and Katya start making sure everything else is ready. I grab the huge tray of patties and head for the veranda.

“Get your ass out here and help,” I call to my brother. He’s still leaning against the counter, digging into the cheese and crackers. I watch him fill both hands before following me outside. The weather is warm with a soft breeze, the perfect night to grill some food, and as I get it ready I watch my family through the large windows.

“Life doesn’t get any better than this,” Vitaly says from beside me, watching our kids play together while our wives laugh at something one of them has said.

“It doesn’t,” I agree.

We watch our wives and kids, knowing that the rest of our family will be here soon. When we first left Moscow, I never dreamed we’d end up here. I always hoped for a happy ending, but I never could have imagined one as good as this.

No matter what our future holds, I’m ready for it. My thoughts are no longer filled with worries and fears and painful memories of a sister I lost way too soon. Alina and Yelena and Evgeny push all the bad away, leaving nothing but the good.

When Alina looks up, she meets my eyes and smiles, and all I can think about is how damn lucky I am that I get to wake up next to her and spend my days loving and taking care of her. It’s more than a man like me deserves, but that just makes me appreciate it all the more. My family is everything and without them I’m nothing. Knowing that makes me a better husband and a better dad. After everything Alina and I have been through, I’ll never take a second of our life together for granted.

When Vitaly hands me a drink and raises his own in a toast to our future, I raise my glass with a smile and have a drink with my brother.

The future’s going to be fucking amazing.

* * *

Vitaly

Matvey and I drink to our future while we watch our wives and kids and flip hamburgers on the grill.

“I’m feeling very American right now,” I tell him with a laugh, drink in one hand, spatula in the other.

Matvey laughs and shakes his head at me. “Don’t kid yourself. You’re Russian to the core.”

He’s right, so I don’t bother arguing. Instead, I watch our kids through the window. Yelena is sitting next to Val, both of them holding a game controller and staring at the TV. Every once in a while, Yelena will sneak a look at him and then they’ll both start laughing, neither one caring about who’s winning. Sveta’s sitting on the floor with Evgeny, helping him with his block fortress.

“They remind me so much of us when we were younger,” I tell Matvey. “Except, you know, they’re happy and well fed and have nicer clothes and aren’t getting the shit beat out of them by abusive parents.”

“Other than that, they’re just like us,” Matvey says with a grin.

“Here’s hoping they’re better behaved.” I take another drink and then look over at my brother. “I have a feeling Sveta’s going to be a handful.”

The deep laugh Matvey gives has me momentarily forgetting about my worries of Sveta’s rebellious teenage years. For so long I was afraid I’d never see my brother like this. The fire changed him, but it was Alina’s disappearance that nearly destroyed him. He can still give one hell of a dead stare when the job requires it, but at home, he’s nothing but big smiles and easy laughter.

“If she’s even remotely like her dad, then you’re in for one hell of a ride,” he says with another laugh.

I groan at the thought. “Here’s hoping Val can talk some sense into her and help keep her in line.”

“Yeah, good luck with that.”

“That’s exactly the kind of brotherly support I was looking for when I confided my deepest fears to you.”

Matvey nudges my shoulder with his. “You know we’ll all do everything we can to keep her safe. She’s going to rebel, though. They all will.” He turns his dark eyes to mine and smiles. “Lucky for us we own a huge part of this city and have hundreds of men on our payroll. They’re not going to be able to get away with shit.”

I laugh because he’s right, and it does make me feel better. “Plus, now that we’ve been working closely with Dominic, there’s really nowhere they can go that we won’t know about.”

Matvey laughs. “Yeah, our kiddos are fucked if they want to get into trouble.”

“I’m going to laugh my ass off when they realize it.”

Feeling better about my daughter’s inability to go hog wild anytime soon, I turn my head and see Katya staring at me. There’s a small smile playing at her lips, and I recognize the hungry look in her eyes all too well. I give her a wink and finish my drink.

“I’ve got to take care of something,” I tell Matvey, smacking his shoulder and leaving him to cook the rest of the burgers.

He gives a soft laugh and then points the spatula at me. “Stay out of the pantry. That’s our spot.”

I laugh and walk inside. Before I go to Katya, I step into the living room to check on the kids. Squatting down by Sveta, I kiss her head and ask her how she’s doing.

“I’m good, Daddy. Look how tall we’re making it.”

I smile at her excitement and watch Evgeny add another block to the tower. Her whiskey-brown eyes, the same exact shade as mine, dart to my face before she lets out another laugh. I can’t believe there was ever a time when I thought I didn’t want a family. I was such a fucking moron, because there’s nothing better than this.

Giving her one more kiss and ruffling Evgeny’s hair, I tell them I love them and then make my way to the couch. Val and Yelena are laughing and playing a racing game.

“Wow, Yelena, you obviously take after your mom. She used to kick our butts in games like this all the time. It was so embarrassing.”

She laughs and crosses the finish line before looking at me. “That’s what Daddy said.”

We both watch Val come in second, but he doesn’t seem even the slightest bit irritated about losing to his cousin. I lean over the back of the couch and wrap my son in a hug from behind, kissing his cheek and tickling his stomach until all I can hear is the sweet sound of his laughter.

Smiling, I kiss his cheek one last time and tell him I love him.

“I love you too,” he says, cheeks red from laughing so hard, and my heart feels too fucking full.

Standing back up, I watch them for a few more seconds before turning to find my wife. She still has the ability to make my heart race with a single look. When Alina takes a plate of snacks to the kids, I grab Katya’s hand

and pull her to the guest bathroom at the very end of the hall, the one no one hardly ever uses.

Katya's blue eyes meet mine as she gives me a wicked grin. "What are you up to?"

I laugh and shut the door behind us before slipping my hands under the cute pink dress she's wearing. "I think you know me well enough by now, *ptichka*, to know exactly what I'm up to."

She laughs when I lift her up and set her on the counter, kneeling down between her beautiful thighs. When I slide her dress up and see the white, cotton panties she's wearing, I let out a groan.

"Jesus Christ, wife, you know what these little cotton panties do to me."

She smiles and runs her hands through my hair as I lean closer and breathe in her sweet scent. Every once in a while, she surprises me by wearing the panties she knows drive me crazy. I know for a fact she was wearing a pink, lacy pair earlier because I watched her put them on, so she must've switched them out right before we left. God, I fucking love her.

The twins were a difficult labor and delivery, and neither one of us wants to risk putting her through that again. Her emergency C-section had been the scariest moment of my life, and every time I think about it, I break out in a cold sweat. We got lucky, damn lucky. She made it through okay, and we have two healthy babies, a boy and a girl, so we're more than happy to not tempt fate any further. She wasn't crazy about being on birth control until menopause, and I couldn't stomach the idea of a future where I only get to fuck my wife with a condom, so I manned up and got a vasectomy a few years ago. Best damn decision of my life.

Running the pad of my thumb up her panty-covered slit, I smile when I feel how wet she is.

"I think my wife needs to come again," I whisper, lightly circling around her clit and letting out a soft laugh when she hisses out a breath and rocks her hips, trying like hell to increase the friction. Yeah, she definitely needs to come.

Leaning closer, I lick a line up her panties before pressing a firm kiss to her clit.

"Fuck," she moans, fisting my hair even tighter.

When I shove her panties aside and slide my tongue into her, she lets out the sexiest whimper and hikes one of her legs up, resting it on my shoulder while I grab the back of her other thigh and spread her wide. The

taste of her fills my mouth, and I can't fucking get enough. I devour my wife's pussy, licking and sucking on every inch of her before focusing on her clit.

"Eyes on me, *ptichka*," I growl, waiting for her to give me what I want. When her blue eyes meet mine, I wrap my mouth around her sensitive skin and suck hard enough to pull another whimper from her parted lips. I watch my wife come undone, feeling her body tense as her eyes go heavy-lidded and she's forced to bite her own lip to keep from screaming my name.

She's so goddamn beautiful when she falls apart for me, and all I can think about is getting inside her. Giving her one last suck, I stand and quickly free my cock. Katya's still drunk on her orgasm, and when I press the head of my cock against her soaking wet slit, she grabs onto my shoulders, using me for support as she angles her hips up to give me better access.

I cup the back of her head, kissing her while I slowly slide into her. The tight, wet heat of her has me growling her name as I start to fuck her faster, needing and wanting her just as badly as the first time I slid into her all those years ago. Marrying Katya completely changed my life, and I've never once looked at another woman since. She's everything to me, and I can't imagine my life without her and our kids.

"Vitaly," she moans, feeling the start of another orgasm.

"Give me what I want, wife," I whisper against her lips. "Let me feel that tight little cunt of yours soak my cock."

When she lets go, I kiss her through it, thrusting in even deeper and harder than before until she's so sensitive she tries to squirm away. I laugh and slow down, giving her long, slow strokes while she catches her breath.

"I can't," she whispers when I slide a hand between us and run my finger over her swollen clit.

I give a soft laugh and trace light circles over her sensitive skin. "One more, *ptichka*."

"Vitaly," she protests, but then I press the pad of my thumb against her clit and start to rub her harder. "Fuck."

Her breathy whisper makes me smile. I know my wife, and I know her body better than she does. She never thinks she can handle another orgasm, and you'd think after over six years of marriage she'd learn that she can handle whatever the hell I want to give her, and right now I want to see her come undone again.

“That’s right, wife. Give me one more.”

I thrust into her, burying myself as deeply inside her as I can while I work her clit harder, forcing her into another orgasm. She tightens around me, squeezing me until I have no choice but to fuck her hard again and give in to my own release. Cupping the back of her head, I fist her hair and with one last thrust, I bury myself inside her and let go. Her inner walls tighten around my pulsing cock, emptying me of every goddamn drop I have. The pleasure is all-consuming, leaving us both breathless and shaking.

I give a soft laugh and kiss her again. “You drive me crazy, *ptichka*. I can’t ever get enough of you.”

“Good,” she whispers against my lips. “I hope you never do.”

“I never will, Katya. I will always want and need you. I love you, baby, so goddamn much.”

“I love you, too.” She kisses me and then turns to see her face in the mirror. When she sees her flushed cheeks and messy hair, she laughs and shakes her head. “They’re going to know exactly what we’ve been up to.”

“Fuck yeah, they will,” I say with a laugh. “The kids will be completely clueless, though, so that’s all that matters.”

“We’re going to have to be careful when they get older.”

“I can be stealthy,” I assure her.

She raises a brow at me. “Since when?”

I laugh at her tone. “Have some faith, baby. I’ll be a pro at stealthy quickies, just you wait and see.”

When I slide out of her, and fix her panties, I can’t keep the huge grin from my face. She’s going to feel my cum slide out of her later, and she’s going to be stuck wearing wet panties all night, a constant reminder of what we just did.

“Don’t be too smug,” she warns. “I’m not the only one who’s all wet.”

I look down at my dick and smile. “I love it when you soak my cock, *ptichka*.”

We get ourselves presentable, and before we walk back out, I give her one last kiss and then thread my fingers through hers, ready to join our family again.

* * *

Lev

“Daddy, which dress should I wear?”

I look down at Natalya and laugh. “Princess, we’re going to be late. Every dress you’ve shown me looks good. Just pick one, baby.”

She studies the three pink dresses that look to me like they could be the same damn dress before finally choosing the one she’s already tried on twice. When I give an exaggerated groan, she looks up at me and laughs before jumping into my arms for a hug. I squeeze her back and pick her up, spinning her around until she’s laughing so hard she can barely breathe.

“Don’t ever get any older,” I tell her. “Stop growing.”

She laughs and shakes her head. “I can’t stop growing. That’s silly.”

“Okay, you can keep growing, but you have to promise to always be Daddy’s princess.”

“I will.” She throws her arms around my neck and kisses my cheek, and as soon as I set her down, she grabs the pink dress she wants and runs off to change…again.

Sasha, our four-year-old son is already sitting on the couch, waiting to go, and when I walk through the living room, I stop to kiss his head and ruffle his hair.

“The girls are taking forever,” I tell him, making him laugh. “You want a juice box while you wait.”

“Yep,” he says, jumping in my arms when I open them. He clings to me like a little spider monkey while I walk him into the kitchen. I dig around for the grape ones he likes so much before grabbing a small package of animal crackers to go with it, because clearly his older sister is going to be a few more minutes.

I sit him down in front of his favorite cartoon and give him another kiss and tell him I love him before going off in search of our youngest. We’ve baby-proofed the hell out of this penthouse, but our two-year-old, Mia, has an instinct for trouble. I found a grey hair the other day, and I know she’s to blame for it. When I walk into our bedroom, I smile when I see my little munchkin. Our room has a sitting area off to the side that we’ve converted into a safe toddler space. A baby gate stretches between the walls, keeping our littlest safely contained while Jolene gets ready.

As soon as she sees me, she jumps up and runs to the gate. “Daddy!”

I laugh and step over it so I can scoop her into my arms. Out of our three kids she looks the most like her mommy with her hazel eyes and auburn hair, but this little girl is all me. She immediately reaches out for my lip ring, giving it a small tug.

“Daddy’s owie.”

I laugh and kiss her chubby hand. “Not an owie, baby. It’s a piercing.”

She’s fascinated by my lip and eyebrow piercings. I recognize the glint in her eyes when she sees them, and I have no doubt she’s going to come home one day with metal in her face. I groan at the thought and cover her face in kisses because I want to keep her this age forever.

Her sweet laugh fills the room, and it makes me so fucking happy to hear it. Sitting us both down on one of the comfy pillows, I look at what she’s been playing with, not at all surprised to see all her favorite stuffed dogs surrounding her. I spot one of Natalya’s old dolls and hand it to Mia, she takes one look at the pink, sparkly dress she’s wearing and grips the doll by her blonde hair and flings it over the baby gate. She shoots me a look that makes it clear I should know better by now.

I throw my head back and laugh because as girlie as Natalya is, Mia is the exact opposite. She cries when Jolene tries to put her in a dress and refuses to play with anything that’s even remotely geared to the ultra feminine. She’s her own person, and we love the hell out of her for it. When she gets bored with her dogs, she flops herself against me and rests her head on my chest. I hold her close and kiss her head.

“Do you know how much Daddy loves you?” I ask her, just like I have every day since she was born.

She smiles and nods her head and then spreads her arms out as wide as she can. “That’s right, baby,” I tell her and then tickle her while her arms are still out. She wriggles and laughs and tries to get free, but there’s no way I’m letting her go. When she’s exhausted, I kiss her cheeks and set her back down by her favorite toys.

“Daddy needs to check on Mommy, sweetheart. I’ll be right back, and then we’re going to Uncle Matvey’s and Aunt Alina’s house.”

I’m not convinced she understands every word out of my mouth, but she gets the idea. I always speak Russian to the kids, and they’ve done an amazing job of picking up both languages, but she’s still only two, so she just smiles up at me and nods her cute head before going back to playing.

“I love you,” I tell her before giving her one last kiss on the head.

“Love you,” she says, making me smile at her cute voice.

God, I love being a dad.

With a smile on my face I go in search of my wife. She’s in our bathroom, putting on mascara and looking sexy as hell. The way she’s bent slightly over the counter as she runs the wand over her lashes has her ass jutting out in a mouthwatering way, and I feel myself start to harden at the sight of her. My piercings press against my jeans, and when I give a soft groan, she smiles and meets my eyes in the mirror.

“We’re already late,” she warns me.

I walk over to her and brush her hair aside so I can kiss her neck. “Exactly,” I murmur against her skin. “We’re already late, so we might as well be a little later and show up with smiles on our faces.”

She laughs at my logic, but she also presses back against my hard cock and wiggles her ass, pulling another groan from me. I nip at her soft skin and reach my hands around to undo her jeans and pull the zipper down before slipping my hand into her panties so I can cup my wife’s pussy.

“Fuck,” she whispers, leaning back and resting her head on my chest while I slide a finger into her.

“We’re about to, *malinkaya*,” I murmur against her skin, snaking my other hand under her shirt so I can cup one of her tits. I squeeze her nipple and run the pad of my finger over her clit, teasing her until she’s glaring at me in the mirror. I laugh and give her another soft bite.

“Show me what’s mine, baby.”

I let go of her, sucking my finger clean while I keep my eyes locked on hers. She knows what I want, and when she slides out of her jeans and panties and turns around so I can see her, I smile and kneel before her.

“Wider, *malinkaya*.”

She widens her stance, allowing me a better view, and when I run my hands up her inner thighs, splaying them on either side of her pussy and spreading her wide, I groan when I see the birthmark that only I know about. Unable to resist when she’s bared open to me like this, I lean closer and run my tongue up her slit, delving inside just enough to drive her crazy before kissing her birthmark.

“Turn around,” I growl, undoing my pants while I look up at her. She quickly turns around, pressing her hands against the counter, and when I start to kiss my way up her perfect ass, she moans my name, so eager for my cock she can barely stand still.

I kiss and lick my way up her spine until I'm standing behind her, covering her much smaller body with mine. After being pregnant, she was worried about her body, and it killed me to see how much it bothered her. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen when I first met her, and that feeling has only gotten stronger since we started a family. This is the body that carried our babies and brought them into this world. If that isn't the sexiest goddamn thing, then I don't know what is.

Just thinking about it drives me crazy, and when I lift her shirt so I can see the faint stretch marks the pregnancies caused, I feel her tense.

"Look at me, *malinkaya*."

She turns her head so she can see me. Our faces are so close they're almost touching when I say, "You have no idea how fucking sexy your body is to me. We have a family because of this body. Don't ever hide yourself from me. Don't deny me the pleasure of seeing you, because, sweetheart, every inch of you drives me fucking crazy."

To prove the truth of what I'm saying, I nudge her legs further apart with my knee and then drag the length of my cock along her slit, letting her feel how goddamn hard I am. Her breath hitches when she feels my Prince Albert piercing nudging against her clit.

I lift her shirt back up, darting my eyes to the mirror so I can see the stretch marks that I think are sexy as fuck as I slowly slide my head into her. With a groan, I pull her shirt up above her breasts and roughly shove her bra aside, exposing more of her body to my greedy eyes. I cup her tit, filling my hand with her before pinching her nipple and feeding her more of my cock.

"Fuck," she whimpers, leaning closer and running her tongue along my jaw. "Kiss me, Lev."

I don't make her ask twice, I turn my head and kiss my wife while I spread her wide and give her three more rungs of my ladder. She moans and runs her tongue over my lip ring, already trying like hell to get me deeper. I smile against her mouth and give her the rest of me, not stopping until she's taken all eight barbells and I've bottomed out inside her.

"Good fucking girl," I growl against her lips, praising her for taking all of me. She lets out another whimper when I start to move, making sure my piercings hit all those hidden nerve endings in her tight pussy.

"Lev," she moans, her body already shaking as she presses her hands against the counter even harder.

“I’ve got you, *malinkaya*. Now be a good girl and come all over my cock.”

I give her one last kiss before gripping her hips and lifting her up even higher. She gasps and rests her arms against the counter, feet raised off the floor and completely at my mercy.

“Fucking hell,” I growl, watching my dick slide in and out of her tight cunt while her ass bounces with each thrust. “God, you’re beautiful.”

She lifts her head so she can watch me fuck her in the mirror, and when she starts to come, I meet her eyes because I don’t want to miss a damn second of this. Her pouty mouth parts on a moan that she’s forced to stifle so the kids don’t hear us, and a flush creeps up her chest and neck, giving her one hell of a sexy glow.

Her pussy clenches so damn tightly around me, but I resist, fucking her through her orgasm and straight into another one. This time I let go and join her. Pressing my chest against her back, I wrap my arms around her, bringing my mouth to hers and kissing her as my cock pulses with my release. My thrusts turn slow and languid as I soften the kiss and savor every second of this moment.

“I love you so damn much,” I whisper against her lips, smiling at the drunk-on-lust look she gives me. She’s still impaled on my cock and squished between me and the hard counter, but the happy look on her face makes it clear she doesn’t give a fuck.

“I love you, too,” she whispers back and then laughs before adding, “We’re going to be so late.”

I smile and slowly slide out of her, putting her feet back on the floor and giving her ass a soft smack. “We were already going to be late, *malinkaya*. We can just blame it on Natalya. Everyone knows she takes forever to get ready.”

She knows I’m joking, so she just shakes her head and starts getting cleaned up and putting her clothes back on. As if Vitaly can sense the exact conversation we’re having, I hear my phone buzz right before I see his name flash on the screen.

We all know what you’re doing. Zip your pants and get your asses over here.

The fucker adds a smiley face at the end and a thumbs up. I laugh and show Jolene the text.

“He’s never going to let us live this down,” she groans.

“Oh, he’s one to talk. We all know he fucked Katya in the hall closet the last time we had them over.”

We’re both still laughing about it when we walk out to get our kids. Mia jumps up with a big smile on her face, and I run over to pick her up, knowing life doesn’t get any better than this.

* * *

Danil

“All right, you both ready?” I look over at our two boys, Maxim and Nikita, while I grab the keys and check my watch again. No way in hell are we going to be on time. Instead of it annoying the ever-living hell out of me like it would have a few years ago, I just look at my family and smile, laughing when Nikita grabs his light-up shoes and holds them out to me. He’s only two, so the damn things amaze him every time he puts them on. It’s cute as hell.

When I take them and then smack the heels together so the stars light up, he laughs and gives me a big smile that shows off all his baby teeth.

“Again!” He yells, clapping his chubby little hands.

I laugh and make them light up again. My family has turned my life upside down in the best possible way. It’s impossible to have order and precision when you have two young boys. They constantly shove me out of my comfort zone, and I love them so damn much for it.

After Nikita’s shoes are on, he happily stomps around, lighting them up while I kiss his head and then look at Maxim. Both boys have the same shade of blue-grey eyes, a perfect combination of me and Simona, and dark hair that never seems to want to stay where it’s supposed to.

“You ready, Max?”

“I’ve been ready, Dad. Niki is the one who’s slow.”

I smile at the nickname he gave his little brother shortly after he was born and then ruffle his hair because I know it’ll make him laugh. When he does, I pull him in for a hug and kiss his head.

“You’re a good big brother, Max. I saw you helping him with his toys earlier. I’m very proud of you for being so patient with him.”

He smiles at my praise and gives me another hug, and I wish I could freeze this moment because they're both growing up too damn fast.

"Laptop!" Nikita yells with the exuberance that only a toddler can manage. "Laptop, Daddy!"

I laugh and kiss Max's head again before letting him go so I can get the toy computer we got Nikita for his birthday. It's a laptop in the loosest sense of the word, but he loves the thing. It folds up just like his daddy's, and it has a big clunky keyboard that makes noises when you press the buttons. I kept waiting for Max to show an interest in computers, but there's not even a hint of any. As soon as he first saw his mom's piano, though, damn, I've never seen a kid's eyes light up like that before. He's been obsessed with music ever since. Simona didn't want to push it on him, but when he started begging for lessons, it became obvious that it was really what he wanted. The kid's a natural, and I'm so damn proud of both my boys.

When Nikita has his laptop, because he won't leave the house without it, I tell them to wait and then go in search of Simona.

"*Sladkaya*, are you almost ready?"

"I'm coming," she hollers to me, rushing out of the bathroom and taking my damn breath away. She's in a simple black dress that looks anything but simple on her. The pregnancies changed her body a little bit, and I can't fucking get enough of it. She was breathtaking before, but there's something about those hips that are just slightly wider and that ass that's just slightly fuller that makes me fucking feral.

"Goddamn," I groan, already feeling myself grow hard.

"Don't you dare," she says with a laugh, holding her hand up like that's going to stop me when I start stalking towards her.

"It's your fault for wearing that dress," I calmly remind her, and when I've got her backed up against the wall, I cup her ass and bring my mouth to hers. My other hand goes straight to her neck, and when I slide my tongue in to meet hers, I run the pad of my thumb along her skin until it's pressing lightly against her pulse point. The rapid beat of it makes my cock even harder, and when I press my hard length against her, she moans and opens her mouth wider for me.

I'm two seconds away from hiking her dress up and freeing my cock, when we hear Max yell, "Mommy! Daddy! Where are you?"

I groan in frustration while Simona gives a soft laugh.

"This isn't funny, *sladkaya*."

She gives me a beautiful smile. “It kind of is.”

I pull her from the wall and smack her ass hard enough to sting. Her blue eyes may widen in surprise and pain, but that doesn’t stop a soft whimper of pure need from escaping right along with it.

It’s my turn to smile when I look at her. “This isn’t over, baby.”

“It better not be,” she says, making me laugh before I give her one last kiss.

I readjust myself and take a few calming breaths before we leave the room to get our boys. When Nikita runs for us with laptop in hand, I laugh and scoop him up.

“Okay, are we ready to go to Uncle Matvey’s and Aunt Alina’s?”

When they both cheer a yes, we leave our penthouse apartment. It’s only going to take a few minutes to get to Matvey’s. When we’d all branched out and gotten our own places, we made sure we’d still be close. None of us wants to live far from the others. As we drive out of the parking garage, I see the black SUV behind us. Bodyguards are assigned to each of our families. It’s something the kids haven’t picked up on yet, but one day they will, and I’m guessing they’re going to hate it. It’s nonnegotiable, though. Our family’s safety is everything to us, and we aren’t taking any chances. We all learned from Alina’s abduction, and nothing like that will ever happen again.

I’m just pulling into the parking garage for Matvey’s place when we see Lev and his family walking to the elevators. When they see us, they stop and wait. I look over at Simona and give her a wink.

“Uh-oh,” she whispers, making me laugh. “I know that look.”

We get the boys out and hold their hands while we walk over to the others. I hug my nieces, one of them in a frilly pink dress, the other in all black so she’s matching her daddy, before I pull Sasha into a hug.

Squatting down next to my own boys, I smile and say, “Daddy forgot something in the car, why don’t you go with Uncle Lev and Aunt Jolene? We’ll be right behind you.”

Lev raises a pierced brow at me while Jolene tries to hide a laugh. Kids are easy to fool. My brother and sister-in-law, not so much. My brother takes pity on me, though, and gives our two boys a big smile.

“Come on, guys, let’s eat all the good snacks before your daddy can.”

They laugh and happily follow them into the elevator. Jolene smiles down at Nikita and picks him up so she can kiss his cheeks. His laughing,

smiling face is the last thing I see before the doors shut.

“Well, that wasn’t very covert,” Simona says, and then laughs when I pick her up and carry her back to the SUV.

“Fooled the kids, though, didn’t it?”

She pats my cheek. “It did, babe. Congrats on getting something past a six-year-old and a two-year-old.”

“So sassy tonight,” I say with a laugh, opening the back door and then shutting it behind us. I sit down and pull her into my lap so she’s straddling me. “Lucky for you there isn’t enough room in here for me to smack your ass like I want to.”

I run my hands up her thighs before filling my hands with her ass and giving a good squeeze. “There’s always later, though, *sladkaya*.”

She moans, already rocking her hips and reaching between us to undo my pants. I smile at her eagerness and let her free my painfully hard cock. The soft whimper she gives when she wraps her hand around me ruins what little restraint I have left.

“This is going to be quick, baby, but I promise I’ll make it up to you later.”

She smiles and cups my face. “Are we going to be spending time in the new soundproofed room tonight?”

I laugh at the excitement in her voice. “We definitely are. It’s been too long since I’ve properly spanked and fucked this ass.”

Another sexy moan escapes her parted lips, and when she quickly bunches up her dress and shoves her panties aside for me, I’m not at all surprised to find her soaking wet.

“Fuck,” I groan, grabbing her hips and positioning her right where I want her before slowly sliding her onto me.

She clutches at my shoulders, throwing her head back on a moan as I lower her onto my cock until she’s taken every damn inch and I’m as deeply inside her as I can get.

“Ride me, *sladkaya*,” I tell her, wrapping my hand around her neck while the other still cups her ass.

I growl and kiss her hard when she starts to work her hips, grinding against me and using me for her own pleasure. Her heart races beneath my fingers, the feel of it alone is enough to almost send me over the edge. My wife consumes me, and I’ll never be able to get enough of her.

When her whimpers grow louder against my mouth, I tighten my grip on her throat. It's hard enough to cut off her air, but not hard enough to leave a mark. I've perfected it over the years because the last thing either of us wants is to scare the kids with a bruise around mommy's neck that neither one of us is willing to explain.

I keep kissing her, even after her mouth goes slack because she's so focused on her own pleasure and on not struggling against her lack of oxygen. I run my tongue over her bottom lip before giving it a hard suck right as I feel her body tense. I savor the feel of her heart racing beneath my fingers and the absolute control that I hold over her before releasing my tight grip and allowing her air.

Her ragged gasp fills the space around us as she comes hard, squeezing me so goddamn tightly with the wet heat of her pussy that I can't help but join her. Growling her name, I thrust my hips up, fucking her even harder, working her through her orgasm and straight into another before my cock starts to pulse inside her, filling her with everything I have.

Cupping the back of her head, I deepen the kiss, needing and wanting her even closer.

"I love you, *sladkaya*," I whisper against her lips when I can speak again. "So goddamn much."

"I love you, too," she whispers back and then gives a soft laugh when she sees the fogged-up windows and her wrinkled dress. She'd been gripping my hair, and when she lets it go, she smiles and says, "I see where our boys get it."

I laugh and give her a wink. "You're the one who messed it up, baby."

I run a hand through my hair, smoothing it back into place while I grow soft inside her. She rests her forehead against mine and runs her fingers over the stubble on my face. Sliding out of my wife is always the last thing I want to do, but our family is waiting, and if we don't go in soon, Vitaly will come looking for us. I'm surprised he hasn't come down to knock on the windows already. The image of my brother peeking in our fogged windows, probably with a snack in hand, is enough to make me lift my beautiful wife off my cock.

She fixes her dress while I tuck myself back in my pants, and when we're both ready, she grabs the dish of potato salad she'd made and gives me a big smile.

"Ready?"

I smile back and kiss her before grabbing her hand and leading her to the elevator, ignoring the strategically parked vehicles filled with bodyguards that Simona has evidently forgotten all about. There's no way in hell they could've seen anything, I never would've allowed that, but she'll still be embarrassed later when she remembers they're there.

We wait for the elevator, and all I can think about is how damn lucky I am. I thought I'd spend my life alone except for my brothers, and now I have a wife and two boys that I love more than I ever thought possible. Looking for Alina for two years forced me to interact with the most disgusting humans on the planet, and I'll never fully get all that shit out of my head, but my family dulls it and pushes it aside enough so that I'm not constantly plagued with the images and nightmares that used to haunt my every waking thought.

I could never go back to a life without them. Wrapping my arm around Simona, I kiss her head and lead her into the elevator, already impatient to see my boys again.

* * *

Roman

As soon as Matvey opens the door, my oldest goes barreling into him, wrapping his skinny arms around Matvey's waist and hugging him tightly. "Hey, Uncle Matvey."

Matvey laughs and ruffles his hair. "Hey, Luka. How are you?"

My oldest answers him in Russian while our youngest runs to Alina and throws himself in her waiting arms. She laughs and kisses Damien's cheeks.

"You're growing too fast," she tells him, hugging him tighter and meeting my eyes. "Tell him to stop."

I laugh and pull her in for a hug. "I keep telling him, too, but he's not listening." I kiss her head and say, "He's stubborn like his aunt."

She laughs and tickles Damien. "All the best people are, little man."

He bursts into a fit of giggles, and when she sets him down, he goes racing to play with his cousins. Luka gives his aunt a big hug before he walks over to Val and Yelena and grabs the extra controller they offer him.

Emily hugs everyone, but before she can walk off to drop the food off in the kitchen, I pull her in for a quick kiss. She laughs when I don't let go right away, but the truth is I never want to let her go.

"Don't stay away too long, *solnishka*," I tell her, swatting her sexy ass when she follows Alina into the kitchen.

"I take it we're the last ones?"

Matvey smiles and hands me a drink. "Yeah, but not by much. Danil and Simona just got here a few minutes ago after sneaking in a quickie in the parking garage."

I laugh and follow him further into the large penthouse apartment and out onto the veranda where Vitaly is cooking hot dogs on the grill. There's already a large plate of hamburgers that are done and ready to go.

"Hey, nice to see you finally decided to show up."

"I'm not that late," I tell Vitaly while I smack Lev on the back and smile at Danil.

Vitaly laughs. "At least he didn't show up with rumpled clothes and an obvious *I just got fucked* look on his face like someone I know."

Being the subtle person he is, he points at Danil while he says it.

"You're one to talk," Matvey says. "You just used our spare bathroom for a quickie."

"Nice," I say, laughing and grabbing a few chips from the bowl that Vitaly's brought out and set by the grill so he can cook and snack.

"Pantry," he says, raising a brow at Matvey. "That's all I'm going to say."

Matvey laughs, and I know better than to ask, because that's my sister he's talking about. I'm glad they're happy, but I don't want details about whatever the hell happened in the pantry.

"When's Dominic getting back?" I ask Lev, noticing the way Vitaly gives a soft laugh at my not-so-subtle change of subject.

"In two weeks. He wants to get together to talk about things when he's back in the city." Lev lets out a soft laugh and crosses his arms over his chest. "Who would've thought that one day we'd be working with the Italians?"

"Not me, that's for damn sure," Vitaly says, taking the hot dogs off the grill.

"Make sure you let a couple get really dark," Danil reminds him.

Vitaly scowls at him. “You think I’d forget how Max likes them? Need I remind you that I’ve wiped all your kids’ asses. I know every detail about my nieces and nephews.” He laughs and adds, “That’s why I’m their favorite uncle.”

I share an eye roll with my brothers, because we’ve all heard this speech before. Before he can turn around and catch us, he points the spatula that one of us really needs to take from him and says, “My god, he’s such a little Roman.”

I look at where he’s pointing and smile. Luka is passing out paper plates and making sure all the little ones have one before he grabs one for himself and starts leading them into the kitchen.

They all start laughing and Lev nudges my shoulder when Luka helps his baby brother put some potatoes on his plate.

“Already taking care of everyone else,” Matvey says with a smile.

“If he’s like his daddy, which obviously he is, then he’s never going to let them forget that he’s the oldest,” Danil says, giving me a smile. “You used to be so damn proud of that.”

“Yeah, how’s that working out for you now?” Vitaly’s laugh and smug grin have me shaking my head. “Hitting eighteen first was awesome. Hitting forty first? Not so much.”

They all have a good laugh at my expense while I finish the last of my drink and grab the plate of burgers.

“Get the hot dogs, assholes,” I tell them, laughing as I walk back inside. Forty is still several years away, and I’m not about to start worrying about it now.

I walk past the kids, smiling at the mix of Russian and English I hear between them and set the plate on the counter right before Vitaly and the others come in to join us. While the kids fix their plates, I work on cutting several hot dogs into teeny tiny slices so they’re toddler safe. Emily stands beside me, scooping out mac and cheese to anyone who wants it. When I look down at her, she smiles and discreetly grabs my ass, making me laugh and shake my head.

Leaning down so my lips are by her ear, I whisper, “Behave, *solnishka.* Be a good girl and you’ll get your reward later.”

The soft moan she gives is only loud enough for me to hear, and when I give a soft laugh and suck her earlobe, she whispers, “Not fair, Roman.”

I stand back up and give her another wink, already thinking about all the things I want to do to her later.

We've had enough family dinners together to have this down to a science. The older kids sit at the kitchen island on barstools while the adults pack around the large table and the toddlers get buckled into highchairs. It's chaotic and loud and so fucking perfect. Six years ago, my brothers and I were stressed to the limit, terrified of what might be happening to Alina and worried we might not find her in time, and now we're surrounded by our wives and kids and running the most successful Bratva in America.

If someone had told me this would one day be my life, I never would've believed it. I never would've believed that anyone could ever be this happy. Looking around the room, I see the smiling, laughing faces of the people I love most in this world, the *only* people I love in this world, and it makes my damn chest ache because I know how fucking lucky we are to be here. I watch my sister smile when she sees Evgeny laugh as he sneaks a piece of hot dog to Finn and the way Matvey watches her reaction with so much love in his eyes—the same ones that looked lifeless while she was gone.

"What are you smiling about?" Emily whispers, leaning in close to me.

I kiss her head and wrap my arm around her shoulder. "I'm just happy, *solnishka*."

She squeezes my thigh and smiles up at me. "Me, too. I'm so glad you crashed my dad's fundraiser all those years ago."

I smile even bigger at the memory of her in that yellow dress, so fucking beautiful and innocent and in way over her head. "I am too, baby, but even if I hadn't, I would've still found you. You were always meant to be mine, little sun."

She rests her head on my shoulder while we laugh and visit and eat way too fucking much. By the time we get everything cleaned up and visit some more, the youngest ones are asleep, and the older ones are barely keeping their eyes open. Emily and I hug everyone goodbye, even though I know for a fact I'll be seeing my brothers tomorrow and we'll most likely do another family dinner in a couple of days. We want our kids to grow up together, just like we did, and oddly enough, I never get sick of seeing my brothers. I can't imagine my life without any of them.

Brothers in blood, in life, and in death.

The oath we took when we were just kids was one of the best decisions of my life, and I've never once regretted it. They're my brothers, and I love

the bastards.

Picking up a sleeping Damien, I carry him against my chest while Emily grabs Luka's hand.

"Bye, Roman, love you," Alina tells me, giving Damien a kiss while she hugs me one last time.

"Bye, love you, too." I smile at my sister right before Matvey pulls her back into his arms and kisses her.

Luka runs off to get the toy laptop that Nikita must've left on the couch before running over to hand it to his Uncle Danil.

"Thanks, Luka," Danil says, patting him on the shoulder. "You saved me from having to drive back out here tonight. Nikita would've been so upset if he woke up and couldn't find his computer."

"Such a little Roman and Danil," Vitaly says with a laugh from beside me.

"And Sveta's going to be a little Vitaly," I say, smiling at the horrified look that crosses his face.

"That's not even funny, brother."

I'm still laughing softly when we leave their penthouse. Luka climbs into the back of the Porsche, because despite Vitaly's best attempts, I never could get into driving a minivan, while I put a sleeping Damien into his car seat. I'm not going to say it's the roomiest of vehicles for two kids, but the boys love it. We also have an SUV that Emily prefers to drive when she takes them out, but I love my Porsche, and I can't bring myself to part with it.

Emily rests her hand on my thigh while I drive us home, and I give a soft laugh when she keeps creeping up higher and higher. Even though it's a short drive, she's already got me fully hard by the time I pull into our reserved spot.

Turning to her, I raise a brow and tap her on the tip of her cute nose. "I knew you were trouble the first second I laid eyes on you, *solnishka*."

She tries to give me an innocent look. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

I lean closer and press my lips against her ear so only she can hear me. "I need to be inside you, sweetheart."

Her breath hitches at my words as she gives a quick nod.

"We're going to put our boys to bed, and then I'm going to fuck you until you can't move."

Before she can respond, I look back at Luka and say, “Ready for bed?”

Thankfully, our oldest doesn’t fight sleep. He just yawns and nods his head, unbuckling his seatbelt and getting out after Emily. I get Damien, hoping like hell he doesn’t wake up, because he does fight sleep, and he’ll push my plans back by a good hour if his little eyes pop open.

We manage to get both kids inside, and while Emily helps Luka get ready for bed, I carry Damien into his room. He’s in Luka’s old nursery, and their Aunt Katya’s beautiful paintings are still covering the walls. I keep the light dim while I very carefully change his diaper and get him into his pajamas. He wore himself out playing with his cousins, so he’s still in a deep sleep when I lay him in his crib and cover him up.

“I love you,” I whisper against his cheek in Russian before kissing him and standing back up to watch him for a few more seconds. I keep my eyes on his small chest, watching it rise and fall. I’ll never get tired of looking at my boys. Just seeing them makes me so goddamn happy.

I give him one last kiss before turning his nightlight on and quietly leaving the room. When I walk into Luka’s bedroom, Emily is reading him his bedtime story. I sit down on his other side, wrapping my arm around him and his mom while I listen to her read the last few pages of his favorite book. He’s hugging his favorite stuffed dog and trying like hell to keep his eyes open.

“Night, Daddy,” he whispers when the story’s over. “Night, Mommy. I love you.”

I kiss his forehead and hug him, smiling at the feel of his small arms wrapped around my neck. “I love you, too. Get some sleep, and when you wake up, I’ll make you your favorite pancakes.”

“Extra chocolate chips?”

I give a soft laugh at how sleepy he sounds. “With double extra chocolate chips.”

He giggles and then kisses my cheek before hugging his mom goodnight. We tuck him in, each of us giving him one more kiss because we can’t resist, and then we finally leave the room with the door cracked so we’ll hear him if he needs us and his nightlight on so he won’t be scared if he wakes up in the middle of the night.

“Taking you to bed isn’t quite as easy at it once was,” I say, picking Emily up and burying my face in her neck.

“Delayed gratification,” she says. “It just makes it all the sweeter.”

I smile and suck on the crook of her neck. “That it does, *solnishka*, but I can’t wait any longer. I need to be inside you right fucking now.”

Carrying her into our room, I quietly shut our door so I don’t wake anyone up and then bring her over to our bed. I love that this is the same room where we’ve had so many of our firsts. I took my wife’s virginity on this bed, I got her pregnant in it, and we've slept together in it every night since. Even if we decide to move somewhere else one day, I’ll never sell this place. There are too many memories here.

Lying her down on the bed, I kiss my way down her neck and then kiss and lick my way across her chest while I pull the straps of her dress down. When it’s not enough, I tug it down even more, exposing the red, lacy bra she’s wearing.

“Fuck,” I groan when I see her hard nipples straining against the see-through material. Unable to resist, I run my tongue over the hard peak as she threads her fingers in my hair and arches up to me. I turn my head so I can kiss the tattoo of my name that still marks her skin. The others had their tattoos removed, but Emily wanted to keep hers. She said she may have been forced to take it, but that it was still my name, and she wanted to keep it on her skin, that it felt wrong to remove it. God, I fucking love her.

Fisting her dress, I pull harder, dragging it down her body until it lands on the floor. I run my eyes over the matching panties she’s wearing.

“Spread your beautiful thighs, *solnishka*.”

She obeys immediately, pulling another groan from me when I see how wet she is. She’s soaked the lace, and the peek-a-boo glimpse of her shaved pussy drives me fucking crazy. Grabbing her thighs, I spread her even wider before licking a line up her panty-covered slit. When it’s not enough, I hook my fingers under the lace and pull them from her body.

“Take your bra off, baby.”

I watch her from between her thighs, and when her tits are on full display, I let out an appreciate groan. “Good girl. Now play with yourself while I eat your pussy.”

She moans my name and cups her breasts, pinching her nipples and letting out a sexy whimper when I run my tongue up her wet slit. I kiss and suck and lick her sweet pussy while I watch her play with her tits. The sight and taste of her makes me so fucking hard I can barely think.

“Roman,” she moans when I kiss my way to her clit, wrapping my lips around her and giving her a good suck. I work her clit, watching as she

pinches her nipples even harder, and when she bucks against me, grinding her pussy into my face as her body tenses and she moans my name again, I suck even harder.

I watch my wife come undone, working her with my tongue until she laughs and tries to squirm away to protect her overly sensitive clit. I tighten my grip on her, holding her still while I slowly lick and kiss every inch of her pussy. Only when I'm covered in her scent and filled with the taste of her do I stand up so I can undress.

She watches me with a smile on her face, still lazily playing with her tits and driving me a little more wild with each teasing stroke of her fingers across her hard, rosy-red nipples.

"You drive me fucking crazy, baby." Naked, I get onto the bed, hovering my body over hers.

"Glad I'm not the only one," she whispers, making me smile.

"No, *solnishka*, you're definitely not the only one."

I kiss her slowly, gently nudging the head of my cock against her slit, giving her one thick inch at a time until I'm fully buried inside her. She wraps her arms and legs around me and cups the back of my head with one hand while the other one is splayed out on my back—every part of her trying to get me as close as possible.

I lose myself completely in her, fucking and kissing her until she's tensing around my body again, whimpering my name against my lips and soaking me with her release. With a groan, I grab the back of her thigh, hiking her leg up so I can go deeper. I cup her face, running my thumb over her lips and growling her name when she latches onto my thumb, sucking me into her mouth.

Her tits bounce, nipples dragging along my sweaty chest with each hard thrust I'm giving her, and I know I'm not going to last much longer. I circle my hips, thrusting in slow and deep, hitting her right where I know she needs it, and when I feel her inner walls tighten even more around my cock, I let go while she sucks my thumb harder.

"Goddamn," I growl, overcome by the ecstasy she's giving me. Pleasure consumes every fucking part of me as I come hard and fill my wife.

"Holy shit," she pants, letting my thumb slide from her lips.

I smile down at her and kiss her gently while we both come down.

"I love you, *solnishka*. You're my whole world, baby. You and the boys are everything to me."

She smiles and cups my face. “I love you, too, Roman. The three of you are everything to me, too.”

Pulling the covers down, I slowly slide out of her and then scoot her up next to me so I can spoon her while she falls asleep. I love the feel of her perfect ass nestled up against me. I kiss a line along her shoulder and neck.

“Get some sleep, *solnishka*. Don’t forget I’m making pancakes in the morning.”

She gives a soft laugh and turns her head to kiss me again. “I want extra chocolate chips, too.”

“Anything for my baby,” I tell her.

I kiss her and then wrap my arms around her, holding her tight as she falls asleep. I keep holding her, knowing I’ll need to check on the kids one last time before I’ll be able to sleep. But for now, I’m content to just hold her, listening to her soft breaths as her heart beats a steady rhythm against my hand.

I try not to worry about the future, but we all know what’s coming. One day our kids will take over the Bratva. One day it will be their turn to rise, but until then we’ll do everything we can to protect them from it. I’m not sure this city is ready for the next generation of Melnikovs, but it’s happening all the same. My brothers and I paved our way in blood so they wouldn’t have to. This life is still dangerous, but we’ll be handing them a city that’s already been secured. Our hope is that it will stay that way, but we all know nothing is ever guaranteed in this life. When the time comes, they’ll rise and take control. It’s the way it has to be, the way it was always meant to be, and my brothers and I will be here to guide and help them.

We’ll do anything for our children, because family is everything, and ours was always meant to rule.

THE END

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed Matvey and Alina’s story!!!

Dominic’s book is coming soon and a second generation series for the Melnikov Bratva!

Please keep reading to find out how to get a free spicy bonus scene!

OceanofPDF.com

Thank You!

I hope you enjoyed Alina and Matvey's story. I can't wait to hear what you all think of it!

If you have the time, I'd be so grateful if you could leave a review. Every review helps my books get seen by more people, so even if it's just a star review, it really means the world to me!

Please click here to sign up for my newsletter.
You'll get updates on new releases, a free novella, and free bonus epilogues for every book!
If you're already signed up, then you can just go here to get all the bonus content!

I promise I will never spam or share your information or bombard you with a massive amount of emails. I value your time, and you can always unsubscribe whenever you like. 😊

I have a Facebook reader group now! Come join and chat with me! All my book news gets put here first. :)

Facebook Group

All my books are available on KU!
Get Them Here!

Be sure to follow me on Amazon so you never miss a new release!

OceanofPDF.com

Also by Sonja Grey

All series are interconnected, unless noted, and can be read as stand-alones, but they're more enjoyable if you read them in order.

All are in KU!

Russian Boxing Club

My Russian Obsession

My Russian Temptation

My Russian Salvation

Stand-Alones

Grumpy Bratva Hitman

Delicious Prey

Fedorov Bratva

Caught by the Bratva Boss

Savage Savior

Arrogant Bratva Bastard

OceanofPDF.com

Medvedev Bratva

Devil from Moscow

Bratva Devil

Filthy Devil

Melnikov Bratva

(Should be read in order)

Paved in Blood

Paved in Venom

Paved in Rage

Paved in Hate

Paved in Fire

OceanofPDF.com

About the Author

Just like her last name, Sonja loves morally grey alphas with a hidden heart of gold. She loves strong men with mile-wide soft spots for the women they love and who will stop at nothing to keep them safe.

She writes mainly dark mafia steamy romances where the lines between good and bad blur into a beautiful, sexy shade of grey.

Zero cheating and HEAs are always guaranteed!

She can be reached at sonja@sonjagreyauthor.com

OceanofPDF.com